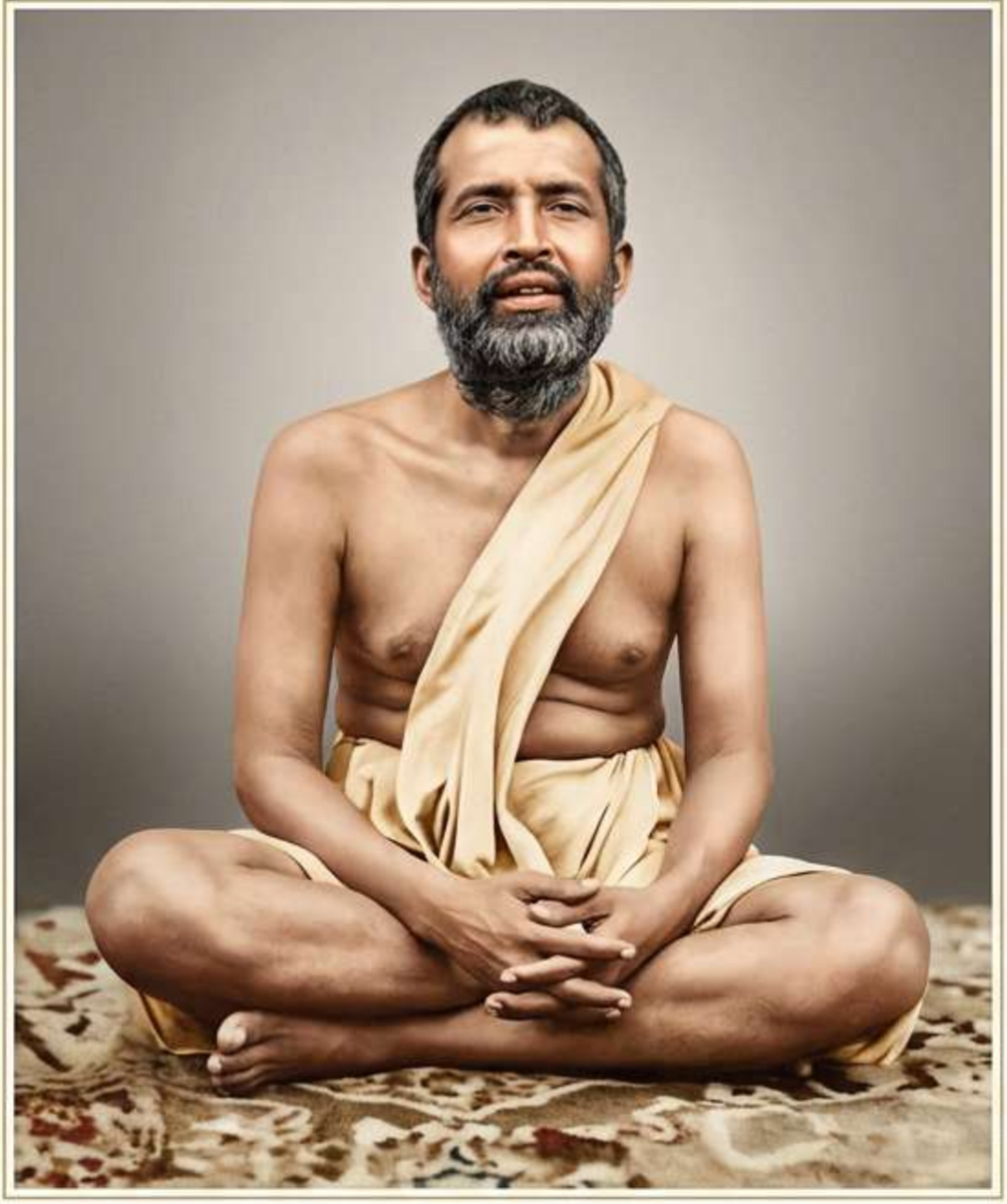
SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAMRITHA

THE GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA



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Introduction

A Brief Life Sketch of Thakur Sri Ramakrishna

Birth of Sri Ramakrishna – father Khudiram and mother Chandramani – primary school – worship of Raghuvir – company of sadhus and listening to the Puranas – beholds a miraculous light – comes to Calcutta, and company of sadhus at Kali Temple in Dakshineswar – sees a miraculous divine form – Thakur like one mad – company of sadhus, Bhairavi Brahmani, Totapuri and Thakur's listening to Vedanta at the Kali Temple – practices spiritual disciplines according to the Tantra and the Puranas – Thakur's talk with the Mother of the Universe – goes on pilgrimage – Thakur's inner circle – Thakur and his devotees – Thakur and the Brahmo Samaj – reconciliation of all religions: Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and so on – Thakur's women devotees – his family of devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna was born to a pious brahmin family in the inland village of Kamarpukur on the second lunar day of the bright fortnight of Phalgun. The village is in the Hooghly district, about eight miles west of Jehanabad (Aram Bag) and about twenty-six miles south of Burdwan.

There is a difference of opinion on the date of his birth.

During Sri Ramakrishna's illness, Ambika Acharya read his horoscope and dated his birth on the third of Kartik, 1286 B.Y., A.D. 1879. This gives a date of 1756 Shaka, the 10th of Phalgun, Wednesday, the second day of the bright fortnight,

Purva Bhadrapada Nakshatra. His calculation is: 1756/109/59/12. On the other hand Kshetra Nath Bhatt's calculation in 1300 B.Y. is 1754/10/9/0/12. According to this calculation it is 1754 Shaka, the 10th of Phalgun, Wednesday, the second day of the bright fortnight, Purva Bhadrapada, 1239 B.Y., 20 February 1833. All tally. At this time there is a conjunction of the sun, the moon, and Mercury. It is the sign of Aquarius. Because of the conjunction of Jupiter and Venus, he would be the chief of a religious sect.

Narayana Jyotirbhushan made a new horoscope (at Belur Math). According to his calculation**,** 1242 B.Y., 6th of Phalgun, Wednesday; 17 February 1836, 4 a.m., the second day of the bright fortnight of Phalgun, when there is a conjunction of the three planets, all the points tally except the 10th of Phalgun given by Ambika Acharya: 1757/10/5/59/28/21. Sri Ramakrishna lived for fifty years. Thakur's father**,** Sri Khudiram Chatterji**,** was a man of firm faith and great devotion. His mother**,** Chandramani Devi**,** was the personification of simplicity and kindness. They had lived in a village called Dere about three miles from Kamarpukur**,** but because of problems relating to Khudiram's refusal to give evidence in a lawsuit in favour of the landlord at Dere, he moved to Kamarpukur with his family.

Sri Ramakrishna's childhood name was Gadadhar. He learned elementary reading in primary school but the arithmetic book by Shuvankara confused him, so he left school to stay at home and attend to the household deity,

Raghuvir. He himself plucked flowers for worship and performed the daily puja.

His voice was exquisitely sweet, and he could sing almost all the songs he heard in theatrical performances.[1] He was cheerful from childhood. Everyone in the neighbourhood – men and women and children – loved him dearly and felt the attraction of his cheerful nature.

Holy men frequently visited a guesthouse at the garden of the Lahas, near Gadadhar's home. He would visit them there and serve them. And when the storytellers read from the Puranas, he would listen with rapt attention. In this way he learned all the stories of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Srimad Bhagavata.

One day when he was eleven years old, Thakur crossed a field to Anur, a nearby village. He later narrated how he had suddenly lost all sense-consciousness when he saw a miraculous light. People thought he had fainted, but he had attained the superconscious state of bhava samadhi.

After the death of his father, Khudiram, Thakur came to Calcutta with his elder brother. He was then seventeen or eighteen years old. In Calcutta he spent some days at Nathair Bagan and a few days at the house of Govinda Chatterji in Jhamapukur. He performed puja there, as well as at the house of the Mittra family in Jhamapukur.

Rani Rasmani dedicated the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, which is about five miles from Calcutta**,** on the 18th of Jaishtha, 1262 B.Y., on the

1. Yatras.

Snana Yatra[1] day, Thursday, 31 May 1855.[2] Sri Ramakrishna's elder brother, Pundit Ramkumar, was appointed the first priest of the Kali Temple. Thakur used to go there often from Calcutta. Intime he also was engaged for the puja work. He was at that time twenty-one or twenty-two years old. His second brother, Rameswar, also sometimes performed puja in the Kali Temple. He had two sons, Ramlal and Shivaram, and a daughter, Lakshmi Devi.

After Sri Ramakrishna had performed the worship for some time, a change came over him. He would remain sitting before the image of the Mother, completely absorbed.

Soon after this, his family arranged his marriage. They thought that marriage might change his state of mind. He was married in 1859 to Saradamani Devi, the daughter of Ramchandra Mukherji of Jayrambati, a village about four miles from Kamarpukur. Thakur was twenty-two or twenty-three years old; Saradamani was six.

After his marriage, Sri Ramakrishna returned to the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. Within a few days, his state of mind suddenly changed. When worshiping Mother Kali, he began to have wonderful divine visions. He would perform arati but not bring the arati to a close. He would sit down to perform puja but the puja would not end.

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1. Ceremonial procession when Lord Jagannath goes out for a bath.
2. Information is taken from the deed of sale of Rani Rasamani's Kali Temple: Deed of conveyance, date of purchase of the temple grounds: 6 September 1847; date of registration: 27 August 1861; price: 2 lakhs, 26,000 rupees.

At times he offered flowers on his own head. Sometimes he could not carry on the puja, but would wander around like a madman.

Rani Rasmani's son-in-law, Mathur, began to revere him as a great man and to serve him. He arranged for another priest to perform Mother Kali's worship and for Hriday Mukherji, Thakur's sister's son, to be his attendant.

After this, Thakur neither attended to the duties of a priest, nor did he enter into the life of a householder. His marriage was in name only. Day and night "Mother, Mother" was on his lips. First he would be like a wooden figure, then he would move around like a mad person. Sometimes he would appear like a child; sometimes he would hide himself at the sight of worldly people attached to 'lust and greed.' He liked nothing but divine talk and continually murmured, "Mother! Mother!"

In the Kali Temple compound there was (and still is) a free kitchen. Holy men and sannyasins would frequently visit it. Totapuri stayed there for eleven months and expounded the philosophy of Vedanta to Thakur. Within only a few days, Totapuri observed that Thakur went into nirvikalpa samadhi. About the year 1866 the Bhairavi Brahmani (who had come in 1859) led Thakur through several Tantric practices. Looking upon him as Sri Chaitanya, she read him Sri Charitamrita and other Vaishnava holy books. When she saw him listening to Vedanta from Totapuri, the Brahmani warned him, "Baba, don't listen to Vedanta. It will dilute your ecstasy and love for God."

Vaishnavcharan, a pundit of the Vaishnava sect, often visited Sri Ramakrishna. It was he who took Thakur to an assembly of Chaitanya's devotees in Calootola. He was president of the group. In this assembly, Sri Ramakrishna experienced the state of God-consciousness and stepped up to occupy the seat of Sri Chaitanya.

Vaishnavcharan had said to Mathur, "This madness is not ordinary; it is the madness of love. He is mad for God." Vaishnavcharan and the Brahmani had seen Thakur's state of divine ecstasy.[1] Like Chaitanya Deva he sometimes passed into samadhi, the state of superconscious awareness, appearing like a piece of wood, unmindful of the world around him. Then he passed through semi-consciousness and returned again to normal consciousness.

Thakur always talked to the Divine Mother and took instructions from Her. He would also weep, calling out, "Mother, Mother." He would say, "O Mother, I shall hear You and You alone. I don't know the sacred books, nor do I know scholars. If You explain to me, only then will I believe." Thakur knew**,** and he would say**,** that He who is the Supreme Being, indivisible Sat-chit-ananda, is the Mother.

The Divine Mother told him, "You and I are one. Live in love and devotion[2] to God for the good of mankind. Many devotees will come to you. Then you won't have to see only worldly-minded people.

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1. Mahabhava.
2. Bhakti.

There are many devotees who are pure and free from worldly desires. They will come."

In the temple at the time of arati, when bells and cymbals rang, Sri Ramakrishna would go to the roof of the kuthi and cry out in a loud voice, "O you devotees, who are you? Where are you? Come soon!"

Thakur looked upon his mother, Chandramani Devi, as another form of the Mother of the Universe and served her with this same spirit. When his elder brother, Ramkumar, passed away, the bereaved mother was stricken with grief. Within three or four years, Thakur asked her to come and stay with him at the Kali Temple. He would go to see her every day, take the dust of her feet, and ask about her welfare.

Thakur went on pilgrimage twice. The first time he took his mother with him. Ram Chatterji and some of Mathur's sons accompanied them on the first railway line laid to Kashi. This was in 1863, within the period of five or six years of the change in his spiritual state. At that time he was either in samadhi day and night, or he remained overwhelmed and intoxicated in ecstasy. During the pilgrimage, after visiting Vaidyanath, he visited Kashi and Prayag.

His second pilgrimage took place five years later, in January 1868, with Mathur Babu and his wife**,** Jagadamba Dasi. This time Thakur's sister's son**,** Hriday**,** was with him. During the journey he visited Kashi, Prayag, and Vrindavan. In Kashi he went into samadhi at the Manikarnika ghat and had a divine vision of Lord Vishvanath whispering

the name of Tarak Brahman into the ears of the dying. He also met and spoke to Trailanga Swami**,** who had taken a vow of silence. In Mathura at the Dhruva ghat, he saw Sri Krishna on the lap of Vasudeva; in holy Vrindavan he saw Sri Krishna with his cows returning in the evening from across the Jamuna. Such sport he saw with his spiritual eye. In Nidhuvan he was overjoyed to meet and talk with Mother Ganga**,** who was immersed in love for Radha.

One day in 1875 Sri Ramakrishna went with his nephew, Hriday, to see Keshab Sen at Belgharia. Keshab was meditating in his garden house with his disciples. By this time Vishwanath Upadhyaya, the Captain from Nepal, had begun to visit him. Gopal of Sinti (the Elder Gopal[1]), Mahendra Kaviraj, Kishori of Krishnanagar, and Mahimacharan had also met Thakur by this time.

The devotees of Sri Ramakrishna's inner circle began coming to him in 1879-80. When they met him, he had almost passed the state of "divine madness." He was like a child then, calm and always cheerful. But he was almost always in the state of samadhi, sometimes in jada samadhi (appearing inert, like a piece of wood, unmindful of the world around), at other times in bhava samadhi (immersed in God). Even when not in samadhi, he remained in a state of ecstasy. He seemed like a five-year-old child, always saying, "Mother! Mother!"

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1. Later Swami Advaitananda.

Ram and Manmohan met Thakur toward the end of 1879. Kedar and Surendra came next, as well as Chuni, Latu, Nityagopal, and Tarak. During the end of 1881 and the beginning of 1882, Narendra, Rakhal, Bhavanath, Baburam, Balaram, Niranjan, M., and Yogen came. Kishori, Adhar, Nitai, the younger Gopal, Tarak of Belgharia, Sarat, and Sashi came in 1883 and 1884. In the middle of 1884 Sanyal, Gangadhar, Kali, Girish, Devendra, Sarada, Kalipada, Upendra, Dwija, and Hari came. Subodh, the Younger Narendra, Paltu, Purna, Narayan, Tejchandra, and Haripada came in the middle of 1885. Likewise came Hara Mohan, Yajneshwar, Hazra, Kshirode, Yogen of Krishnanagar, Manindra, Bhupati, Akshay, Navagopal, Govinda of Belgharia, Ashu, Girendra, Atul, Durgacharan, Suresh, Prankrishna, Nabai Chaitanya, Hari Prasanna, Mahendra (Mukherji), Priya Mukherji, Sadhu Priyanath (Manmath), Vinod, Tulasi, Harish Mustafi, Basakh, Kathak Thakur, Sashi of Bali (Brahmachari), Nityagopal (Goswami), Vipin of Konnagar, Bihari, Dhiren, and Rakhal (Haldar) came – one after another.

Ishwar Vidyasagar, Shashadhar Pundit, Dr. Rajendra, Dr. Sarkar, Bankim (Chatterji), Mr. Cook from the United States, devotee Williams, Mr. Missir, Michael Madhusudan, Krishnadas (Pal), Pundit Dina Bandhu, Pundit Shyamapada, Dr. Ramnarayan, Dr. Durgacharan, Radhika Goswami, Shishir (Ghosh), Navin (a clerk), and Nilkantha had all met Thakur by 1885. He had visited Trailanga Swami in holy Kashi and Mother Ganga in Vrindavan. Taking him as (the incarnation of)

Radha (divine love), Mother Ganga had not wanted Thakur to leave Vrindavan.

Before the devotees of the inner circle came, Krishnakishore, Madhura, Sambhu Mallick, Narayan Shastri, Gauri Pundit of Indesh, Chandra, and Achalananda were frequent visitors to Thakur. The court pundit of the King of Burdwan, Padmalochan, and Dayananda (the founder) of the Arya Samaj also met Thakur. Many devotees of Thakur's native village, Kamarpukur, and of Sihore and Shyambazar had been drawn to him.

Many members of the Brahmo Samaj met Thakur. Keshab, Vijay, Kali (Bose), Pratap, Shivanath, Amrit, Trailokya, Krishna Bihari, Manilal, Umesh, Hirananda, Bhavani, Nanda Lal, and many other Brahmo devotees often visited him. Thakur also visited them. During Mathur's lifetime, he and Thakur went to Devendranath Tagore's house and paid a visit to the Adi Brahmo Samaj during service hours. Later he went to see Keshab's Brahmo temple and the Sadharan Samaj during the time of worship. He would frequently visit Keshab's house. How much he would rejoice in the company of Brahmo devotees! Keshab visited him frequently, sometimes with devotees, sometimes alone.

At Kalna he met Bhagavan Das Babaji. Seeing Thakur's state of samadhi, Babaji said, "You are indeed a great spiritual soul. Only you are fit to take the seat of Chaitanya Deva."

Thakur practiced the disciplines of the Vaishnavas, the Shaktas, the Shaivas; he also recited the name of Allah and meditated upon

Christ. He realized that they all led to the same goal. In his room there were pictures of gods and goddesses and an image of the Buddha. There was also a picture showing Jesus Christ saving Peter from drowning. These pictures can still be seen if you go to that room. English and American devotees can now be seen meditating upon Thakur in the room.

One day he implored the Divine Mother, "O Mother, I would like to see how your Christian devotees pray to You. Please take me to a place where they worship You." In a few days, he went to Calcutta and watched a Christian service, standing at the entrance to the church. When he returned, Thakur said to the devotees, "I didn't enter the church to sit for fear of the steward [of the Kali Temple]. I said to myself, 'Maybe he wouldn't allow me to enter the temple.'"

Thakur had many women devotees. He called Gopal's Mother "Mother" and referred to her as "Gopal's Mother." He looked upon and worshiped all women as incarnations of Bhagavati (the Divine Mother). He said, "As long as a man cannot see a woman as Mother Herself, he cannot have pure love for God." He warned men to guard themselves against women till that stage is reached. He went so far as to forbid young men to keep the company of even the most devout woman. He once said to the Divine Mother, "Mother, I will run a knife across my throat if any lustful thought arises in my mind."

Thakur's devotees are countless. Some are known, others unknown. It is impossible to name all of them. The names of many of them will be

found in *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita.* Those who visited him during their boyhood are: Ramakrishna, Paltu, Tulasi, Shanti, Sashi, Vipin, Hiralal, Nagendra Mitra, Upendra, Surendra, and Suren. A number of little girls also saw Thakur. Now they, too, are his devotees.

Many became his devotees after he ended his divine play and others are still coming. In Madras, Sri Lanka, Uttar Pradesh, Rajputana, Kumaon, Nepal, Bombay, Punjab, Japan, and also in America and England – at all these places the family of devotees continues to grow.

Janmashtami
1310 B.Y., A.D. 1903

Section I

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar

Chapter One

The Kali Temple and garden

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar Kali Temple – chandni (portal) and the twelve Shiva temples – brick courtyard and the Vishnu temple – Sri Sri Bhavatarini Mother Kali – natmandir (the music pavilion) – the store, the pantry, the guest house and the place of sacrifice – the office rooms – Sri Ramakrishna's room – nahabat, bakultala and panchavati – jhautala, beltala and kuthi – ghat for washing utensils, Gazitala, the main gate and the back gate – Hanspukur, stable, cowshed, and flower garden – the verandah of Sri Ramakrishna's room**,** the "Abode of Joy."

It is Sunday. The devotees have a day off from work, so they are coming in great numbers to the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar to see the Paramahamsa Deva, Sri Ramakrishna. His door is open to all. Thakur talks freely with all the visitors: sadhus,[1] paramahamsas,[2] Hindus, Christians, Brahmos,[3] Shaktas,[4] Vaishnavas,[5] men and women – they all visit him. Blessed you are**,** Rani Rasmani! It is because of your virtue that such a beautiful temple

1. Wandering monks.
2. One belonging to the highest order of knowers of Brahman.
3. Member of the Brahmo Samaj.
4. Hindus who worship God as the Primal Divine Energy.
5. Hindus who follow the path of devotion and worship God as the Preserver (Vishnu), or divine incarnation such as Rama and Krishna.

has come into being. Besides, there is a living image! People are able to come here to meet and worship a great spiritual personality.

The chandni and the twelve Shiva temples

The Kali Temple is located about five miles north of Calcutta on the bank of the Ganges. Arriving by boat and climbing toward the east up a broad staircase, one enters the Kali Temple. It is at this very ghat that Sri Ramakrishna takes his bath. Just up from the staircase is the chandni. Watchmen of the temple live there. Their cots, mango-wood chests, and one or two jugs and such things are lying around. When the gentlemen of the neighbourhood come to the temple garden to take their bath in the Ganges, some of them sit here and gossip while they have an oil massage. Some of the sadhus, fakirs, and Vaishnavas who come to have prasad[1] from the guest house wait here for the bell announcing the food offerings.[2] At times a bhairavi (woman worshiper of the Mother), dressed in ochre cloth and holding a trident in her hand, is seated here. She, too, will go to the guest house for food when the bell rings. The chandni is situated in the center of the twelve Shiva temples – six temples to the north and six to the south. People passing by in boats, seeing the twelve temples from a distance, exclaim, "That is the temple garden of Rani Rasmani!"

1. Offered food.
2. Bhoga.

The brick courtyard and the Vishnu temple

There is a cemented brick courtyard to the east of the chandni, and then the twelve Shiva temples. In the center of the courtyard are two temples facing each other. To the north is the temple of Radhakanta. Directly south of it is the temple of Mother Kali. In the Radhakanta Temple, the images of Radha and Krishna face west. One enters up a flight of stairs. The floor of this temple is paved with marble, and a chandelier hangs in its vestibule. Not in use now, it is protected by a red linen cloth. A watchman keeps vigil in the temple, and canvas screens protect the deities from the midday sun in the western sky. Passages left open between the rows of columns in the vestibule are covered by screens. Toward the southeast corner is a pitcher of Ganges water, and near the threshold of the door is a vessel containing holy water.[1] Devotees bow down before the deities and then take a few drops of the water. Inside the temple the statues of Radha and Krishna sit on a raised seat. Sri Ramakrishna's first duties as priest in 1857 and 1858 were at this temple.

Sri Sri Bhavatarini Mother Kali

In the southern temple is the beautiful stone image of Kali, the Divine Mother. She is called the Saviour of the World.[2] The floor of the temple is paved in black and white marble. Steps ascend to a raised platform on which there is a silver lotus of a thousand petals. On this lotus Shiva lies on His

1. Charanamrita.
2. Bhavatarini.

back, His head to the south and feet to the north. The image of Shiva is made of white marble. On His breast stands the stone image of the very beautiful three-eyed Shyama Kali. She is dressed in a Benares sari and decorated with jewels of many kinds. On Her lotus feet are tinkling anklets,[1] ornaments,[2] red china roses, and bel leaves. One of the anklets is called panjeb and is worn by women of the west (Punjab and Uttar Pradesh). This ornament was procured by Mathur Babu at the special desire of Sri Ramakrishna. The Mother's arms are adorned with broad bangles[3] and armlets made of gold. Her lower arm wears the bracelets known as "coconut flowers," paincha, bauti, and bala. On Her upper arms She wears armlets called tarr, tabiz, and baju. The last one has a pendant attached to it.

Around Her neck the Divine Mother wears a golden cheke, a pearl necklace of seven strings, a golden necklace of thirty-two strings, a "chain of stars," and a golden garland made of human skulls. On Her head She wears a crown. Her ears are adorned with kanbala and kanpash, golden earrings that look like flowers, and also round golden earrings[4] and the "golden fish." She wears a pearl nose ring. The three-eyed Goddess holds a decapitated human head and a sword in Her upper and lower left hands. Her upper right hand makes the sign of fearlessness and the lower offers boons. Around Her waist She wears a garland of human

1. Nupur.
2. Gujai, panchem, panjeb, and chutaki.
3. Bauti.
4. Chaundani.

arms, as well as golden waist-chains called neem fruit and komarpata.

In the northeast corner of the temple is a beautiful bed where the Mother rests. On a side wall hangs a chamara[1] with which Sri Ramakrishna fanned Her. On a lotus stand on the altar is water in a silver water glass. Rows of vessels that hold water for Mother to drink are on the steps. On a silver lotus seat to the northwest is a lion made of eight metals. Images of an iguana and a trident are to the east. Toward the southwest of the platform is a vixen, to the south is a black stone bull, and to the northeast is a swan. On one of the steps leading to the platform is an image of Narayana[2] on a small silver throne. On one side of him is an image of Ramlala, the boy Ramachandra, made of eight metals, which the Paramahamsa Devaobtained from a holy man. There is also an emblem of Shiva, as well as some other gods.

The Divine Mother faces south. Directly in front of Her, to the south of the platform, is a pitcher. After puja this pitcher[3] is dabbed with vermilion, covered with various kinds of flowers, and decorated with flower garlands. On another wall is a copper pitcher filled with water to wash the Mother's face. Above, in the temple canopy behind the image, a beautiful piece of Benares silk hangs. Adding to the beauty of the image are silver

1. A fan made of the white hair from the tail of the yak called Chamari.
2. God the Preserver.
3. Mangal-ghat.

columns on the four sides of the platform with a costly canopy spread over them.

The temple is of medium size. Some of the gates of the vestibule are protected by strong doors. A guard sits near one of the doors. Nearby is a small vessel containing holy water. The top of the temple is adorned with nine pinnacles. Four of the pinnacles rise from the lower corners of the roof, four from the middle, and above them one pinnacle rises from the center peak. It is now broken. The Paramahamsa Deva performed puja in this shrine as well as in the shrine of Radhakanta.

The natmandir (the theatrical hall)

In front of Kali's shrine – that is, to the south – is a beautiful and spacious natmandir on which Shiva[1] and his attendants, Nandi and Bhringi, are depicted.

Before entering the Mother's temple, Sri Ramakrishna would fold his hands and bow to Shiva, as though entering the temple after taking His permission. Two rows of high columns stand north-south of the natmandir with a roof over them. To the east and west of the row of columns are two portions of the natmandir. During festivals, especially on Kali Puja day, theatrical performances are performed in the natmandir. It was there that Mathur Babu, the son-in-law of Rasmani, at the request of Sri Ramakrishna, carried out a donation to the poor called "the

1. Mahadeva.

ceremony of the mound of grain."[1] It was here that Sri Ramakrishna worshiped Bhairavi.

Store, pantry, guest house, and place of sacrifice

To the west of the courtyard are the twelve Shiva temples, and on the three other sides are single-storied rooms. The rooms to the east include the storeroom, a room for keeping luchis (fried bread), a room for the food offerings for Vishnu, a room for preparing fruit and other offerings, and a room for cooking the offerings for the Divine Mother, as well as the guest house for feeding guests. If guests and visiting sadhus do not eat here, they must go to the office of the steward of the temple for permission to take rations from the store. To the south of the natmandir is the place of sacrifice.

Food prepared for Vishnu's shrine is vegetarian, but not so for Kali. There is a separate kitchen for preparing food for Her. In front of the kitchen of the Divine Mother, maidservants cut fish with big knives. On the dark night of the month[2] a goat is sacrificed. The food offering is over before noon. In the meantime beggars, sadhus, and guests take plates made of sal leaves from the guest house and sit down in rows. Brahmins are allotted a separate corner and the brahmins working here have different seats as well. Prasad for the steward is sent to his room. The descendents of the founder of the temple, Rani Rasmani, stay in the kuthi when

1. Dhanyameru.
2. Amavasya.

they visit the temple; their prasad is taken to them there.

Office rooms

In the row of rooms on the south side of the courtyard are offices and the residences of officials. The steward and clerks stay here, and the storekeeper, maidservants, men servants, priests, cooks, brahmin cooks, and gate keepers are generally found walking in and out. Some of these rooms, which contain property of the temple, such as carpets and tents, are locked. Some of the rooms are used as storerooms on the birthday celebrations of the Paramahamsadeva. The cooking for this great celebration is done on the ground to the south.

There is another row of single-storied rooms to the north of the courtyard. In its center is the main gate. As in the chandni, here, too, gatekeepers keep watch. Shoes must be taken off before entering both places.

Sri Ramakrishna's room

In the northwest corner of the courtyard, just north of the twelve Shiva temples, is Sri Ramakrishna's room. Due west of his room is a semicircular verandah. It was from here, facing west, that Sri Ramakrishna often watched the Ganges. Next to this verandah is a path, and to its west, a flower garden and terrace, alongside which flows the pure, sweet, melodious waters of the Ganges, the symbol of all pilgrimages.

Nahabat (the music pavilion), bakultala and panchavati

Just north of the Paramahamsa Deva's room is a rectangular verandah. To its north is a garden path and flower garden. And beyond that is the nahabat (the music pavilion). The revered mother of Sri Ramakrishna and later the Holy Mother lived in the lower room. Next to the nahabat are the grove of bakul trees and river ghat where the women of the neighborhood take their bath. It was at this ghat that the venerable mother of the Paramahamsa Deva breathed her last, with the lower half of her body immersed in the holy waters of the Ganges.

A little north of the bakultala is the panchavati (a grove of five trees). It was in the panchavati that the Paramahamsa Deva practiced many religious austerities. He would often stroll around the area with his devotees. At times, deep at night, he would rise and go there. This grove consists of five trees: the bata (Indian fig), peepal, neem, amalaki, and bel trees which Thakur himself planted. On returning from Vrindavan, Sri Ramakrishna scattered the dust of that holy place at the panchavati. Directly east of it, Sri Ramakrishna had a thatched hut built. It was here that he meditated and practiced many austerities. This hut has since been replaced by a room made of brick.

In the center of the panchavati are a banyan tree and a peepal tree which have grown together and now appear as one. Being very old, the tree has many holes in it, which have become the living places of many birds and animals. Below it is a

brick-built circular platform with steps. Seated on the northwestern side of the platform, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna carried out many devotional exercises. With great yearning he called upon God like a cow cries for its calf. Now, across the hallowed seat, a branch of the peepal tree has fallen, though it has not completely broken away from the parent bata tree. It seems to say that no great man worthy to sit on that platform has yet been born again.

Jhautala, beltala, and kuthi

A little north of the panchavati is a railing made of iron wire. On the other side of it is the jhautala, where rows and rows of willow trees stand. A short distance east from the jhautala is the beltala. Here, too, the Paramahamsa Deva practiced many difficult austerities. Beyond the jhautala and the beltala is a high wall and just north of it is the government magazine.

Going north from the main gate of the courtyard, one comes to the two-storied kuthi. Whenever Rani Rasmani and her son-in-law, Mathur Babu, and other members of the family visited the temple, they would stay at the kuthi. During their lifetime, the Paramahamsa Deva lived in a western room on the ground floor. A path from this room leads to the bakultala ghat, from where there is a splendid view of the Ganges.

Ghat for washing utensils, gazitala, and gates

Going east on the path between the main gate of the courtyard and the kuthi is a fine reservoir with a specially built, paved ghat. This ghat, which

borders the east side of Mother Kali's temple, is used for washing utensils. A short distance north from the main gate path is another ghat, to the side of which is a tree called gazitala. A little further east on this path is another gate. It is the main exit from the garden. People from Alambazar or Calcutta visit the temple through this gate. People from Dakshineswar come in through the back gate. There, too, a watchman is stationed. When the Paramahamsa Deva used to return to the Kali Temple from Calcutta at midnight, the watchman at this gate would unlock it. The Paramahamsa Deva would call him to his room and give him luchis, sweets, and other items of prasad.

Hanspukur, stable, cow sheds, and lower garden

To the east of the panchavati is another reservoir called the Hanspukur (Goose Tank). At its northeast corner are a stable and a cow shed. East of the cow shed is the back gate. It leads to the village of Dakshineswar. It is used by priests and temple officials and their families who live in Dakshineswar.

There is a flower-bordered path along the Ganges running north from the southern extremity of the garden to the bakultala and the panchavati. An east-west path from the south of the kuthi is also flanked by flowers. From the gazitala to the cow barn, the stretch of land to the east of the kuthi and the Hanspukur also has flowering plants of different species, fruit trees, and another reservoir.

Very early in the morning when the eastern sky is turning red, one can hear the sweet sounds of the

morning arati and morning music played on the sanai. At this time flowers from Mother Kali's flower garden are plucked for worship. On the bank of the Ganges in front of the panchavati are vilva trees and fragrant beds of pagoda flowers. Sri Ramakrishna was very fond of tulips, madhavi (myrtle), and gulachi flowers. He brought a madhavi creeper from Vrindavan and planted it here. On the eastern bank of the Hanspukur and the kuthi are champak plants and at a little distance are plants of jhumka, hibiscus, roses, and kanchan (gold flower). Aparajita grows on hedges, and close by are jasmine and shafalika flowers. Along the western wall beside the twelve Shiva temples are red and white oleander, roses, and both large and small jasmine. Interspersed are datura, which provide large and fragrant white blossoms used in the worship of Shiva. At intervals there are basil plants growing on high brick-built platforms. To the south of the nahabat are larger jasmine, gardenia, and roses. Not far from the brick-built ghat are lotus oleander[1] and the cuckoo-eyed. Near the Paramahamsa Deva's room are a couple of coxcomb, and close by are double jasmine, gardenia, roses, tulips, white and red oleanders, double hibiscus, and Chinese hibiscus.

Sri Ramakrishna used to gather flowers for worship himself. One day when he was plucking the leaves of a bel tree in front of the panchavati, a small portion of the bark of the tree came off. He felt as if the one who lives within all things had received a severe pain. Thenceforth, he could no

1. Padmakarvi.

longer pluck bel leaves. Another day when he was walking around picking flowers, he was suddenly aware that the various flowering plants were but so many bouquets adoring the great image of Shiva. Shiva was thus being worshiped day and night. Henceforth, he ceased to pick flowers.

Verandah of Thakur Sri Ramakrishna's room

Two adjoining verandahs extend east and south from Sri Ramakrishna's room. It was in the south wing of these verandahs which faced the courtyard that Sri Ramakrishna often sat with the devotees. There he would talk to them about God and sing devotional songs with them. In the northern wing, devotees also gathered to celebrate his birthday and to sing hymns with him. At times he would take prasad with them there. It was also on this verandah that Keshab Chandra Sen visited him and would talk for long hours like a disciple. They would enjoy themselves with puffed rice, coconut, luchis, and sweets. It was here, also, that Sri Ramakrishna went into samadhi at the sight of Narendra.

The Abode of Joy

The Kali Temple has become the Abode of Joy. Radhakanta, Bhavatarini, and Mahadeva are worshiped here daily. Offerings for worship are made and guests served. On one side the sacred view of the Bhagirathi (the Ganges) stretches far into the distance; on the other is a unique and varied flower garden that charms everyone with its abundant fragrance and beauty. As well, there is the God-man, intoxicated day and night with love

for God. And there is the perennial festival of the ever-joyful Divine Mother. Music emanates from the nahabat at the sacred time of the dawn arati and again when worship starts about nine in the morning. At noon it sounds after the food offering, when the deities retire to rest. It is again played at four o'clock when they rise after their rest. Music is heard again from the nahabat at the time of evening arati and last of all, at nine at night, when, after the evening offerings of food, the deities go to bed.

Chapter Two

Tava kathāmṛtaṁ taptajīvanaṁ kavibhir īḍitaṁ
kalmaṣāpaham ।
śravaṇamaṅgalaṁ śrīmad ātataṁ bhuvi gṛṇanti te
bhūridā janā ।।

[The nectar of Your story revives the parched soul of man. Poets (men of knowledge) praise it. It wipes away our sins. To hear it is, in itself, auspicious. It is pervasive, limitless, and beautiful. Only those who have been generous in their past lives understand it.]

– Srimad Bhagavata X:31:9

The first meeting – month of February 1882

The Kali Temple at Dakshineswar on the bank of the Ganges. It is springtime in February 1882. On Thursday, 23 February, one day after his birthday, Sri Ramakrishna went for a cruise on a steamer with Keshab Sen and Joseph Cook. It is now a few days later, and evening is approaching. M. comes to Sri Ramakrishna's room. It is his first visit.

He sees a roomful of people seated motionless, drinking in the nectar of his words. Thakur is seated on his bed, facing east and talking about God with a smiling face. The devotees are sitting before him on the floor.

When does renunciation of work take place?

M. looks in and is speechless. He wonders if it is Sukadeva telling the story of the Lord and if at that spot all the places of pilgrimage have gathered together. Or is it Sri Chaitanya sitting in the holy land of Puri singing the names and glories of Bhagavan[1] with Ramananda, Swarup, and other devotees seated before him?

Sri Ramakrishna is saying, "When your hair stands on end just at the name of Hari or Rama, and tears flow from your eyes, know for certain that sandhya[2] and other daily observances are no longer necessary. They are over for you. You have then gained the right to give up work. Indeed, karmas fall off of their own accord. In that state mere repetition of the name of Rama or Hari, or the Omkara[3] is enough." And he adds, "Sandhya ends in Gayatri[4] and Gayatri in Om."

M. has walked here, from garden to garden, with Sidhu[5] from Baranagore. It is Sunday, 26 February, 15th Phalgun, a holiday, and he has come out for a walk. A little earlier he was strolling in Prasanna

1. The beloved Lord.
2. Daily service morning, noon, and evening, as laid down for the twice-born.
3. Om, the Vedic symbol for the Supreme Being.
4. The ancient Vedic mantra (sacred text) that the brahmins and other twice-born Hindus repeat everyday while meditating on the Supreme Being.
5. Siddheswar Majumdar. His home is in north Baranagore.

Bannerji's garden. It was there that Sidhu said, "There is a beautiful garden on the bank of the Ganges. Would you like to see it? A paramahamsa lives there."

Entering the garden through the main gate, M. and Sidhu come directly to Sri Ramakrishna's room. M. is speechless as he watches. He thinks, how charming this place is, how charming this man is, how sweet is his talk – I don't feel like leaving. After a while he says to himself, But let me first look around and see where I have come. I will then come back and sit down.

As he comes out of the room with Sidhu, the sweet sound of arati[1] begins with cymbals, bells, and drums all sounding in unison. Music comes from the nahabat on the southern side of the garden. Floating over the bosom of the Ganges, it seems to fade somewhere far, far away. The spring breeze is gentle and fragrant with the sweet smell of many flowers. In the spreading moonlight, preparation for the arati of the deities is taking place all around. Watching the arati in the twelve Shiva temples and in the temples of Radhakanta and Bhavatarini, M. is filled with supreme joy. Sidhu says, "This is Rasmani's temple. Here the gods are worshiped every day from morning till evening. Many holy guests and the poor come here."

After passing through a grand brick quadrangle, they emerge from the Bhavatarini Kali Temple, talking. When they reach Sri Ramakrishna's room, the door is closed. Incense was burnt a little while before.

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1. Waving of lights before sacred images along with singing of hymns.

Having been educated in English ways, M. cannot enter a room that is closed. The maidservant, Vrinde, is standing at the door. M. asks, "Is the holy man[1] in the room now?"

Vrinde: "Yes, he is inside."

M.: "How long has he been here?"

Vrinde: "Oh, many, many years!"

M.: "Well, does he read many books?"

Vrinde: "Oh dear, books and things like that are all on his tongue!"

M. is fresh from college. He is very surprised to hear that Sri Ramakrishna does not read books.

M.: "Well, perhaps he is now performing evening devotions. Can we enter the room? Will you please tell him about us?"

Vrinde: "Why, go in, my children. Go inside and sit down."

Thereupon they enter the room and see that no one else is there. Sri Ramakrishna is seated alone on the bedstead. Incense is burning and all the doors are closed. M. folds his hands in greeting as he enters the room. At the bidding of Sri Ramakrishna, M. and Sidhu sit on the floor. Thakur asks, "Where do you live? What do you do? What has brought you to Baranagore?" M. answers all his questions, but he notices that in the course of conversation, Thakur's mind wanders away to something on which he is meditating. Later, M.

1. Sadhu maharaj.

hears that this is called bhava samadhi.[1] It is like a man sitting with a fishing rod in his hand, waiting to catch a fish. The fish comes and begins to bite at the bait and the float trembles. The man is all attention. He grasps the rod and looks at the float with a concentrated mind, talking to no one. Sri Ramakrishna's state is exactly like this. Later, M. hears and sees that Thakur goes into this state after his devotions. At times, he loses all external consciousness.

M.: "You will now perform your evening worship.[2] Perhaps we should leave."

Sri Ramakrishna (*in ecstasy*): "No evening worship. No, it is not that."

After some conversation, M. salutes Thakur and takes his leave.

Thakur says, "Come again."

On his way home, M. wonders to himself, Who may this god-man be? How is it that my soul longs to see him again? Can a man be great without reading books? How strange that I feel like visiting him again. He said, "Come again." I shall come tomorrow or the day after, in the morning.

1. God-consciousness, ecstasy.
2. Sandhya.

Chapter Three

akhaṇḍamaṇḍalākāraṁ vyāptaṁ yena carācaram ।
tatpadaṁ darśitaṁ yena tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ ।।

[Salutations to the guru who has made it possible to realize Him who pervades this entire universe of the moving and unmoving.]

– Vishveshwara Tantra 2

Second meeting and conversation between the guru and the disciple

The second meeting is at eight o'clock in the morning. Thakur is going to have a shave. The winter cold still lingers, so he wears a moleskin shawl hemmed with muslin. Seeing M., he says, "So you have come! Good. Sit here."

They are on the southeast verandah with the barber. Thakur sits for a shave and talks to M. He wears the shawl, and slippers on his feet. He is smiling. He stammers a little when he talks.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Well, where do you live?"

M.: "In Calcutta, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Who have you come to see who lives around here?"

M.: "I came to Baranagore to visit my elder sister at Ishan Kaviraj's house."

Keshab Chandra – Sri Ramakrishna weeps before the Divine Mother

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, how is Keshab these days? He was seriously ill."

M.: "I also heard that. I hope he is well now."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I made a vow to offer a green coconut and sugar to the Divine Mother for Keshab's recovery. Sometimes I used to wake up at midnight and cry to Her, saying, 'O Mother, please let Keshab get well! If he doesn't live, whom shall I talk to when I go to Calcutta?' That's why I vowed to offer green coconut and sugar.

"A Mr. Cook came here. Does he lecture? Keshab took me on board a steamer. Mr. Cook was there."

M.: "Yes, I did hear of him, but I haven't attended
any of his lectures. I don't know much about him."

Household and the duty of a father

Sri Ramakrishna: "Pratap's brother came here and stayed for some days. He had no work to do. He said that he wanted to stay here. He had left his wife, son, and daughter in the care of his father-in-law. He has many children. I took him to task. Look, he has so many children! Should they be fed and looked after by neighbours? He's not ashamed for somebody else to take care of his family and that they are a burden to his father-in-law! I scolded him rather severely and told him to look for work. After that he left here."

Chapter Four

ajñānatimirāndhasya jñānāñjanaśalākayā ।
cakśur unmīlitaṁ yena tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ ।।

[Salutations to the Guru who, with the collyrium stick of knowledge, has opened the eyes of one blinded by the disease of ignorance.]

– Vishveshwara Tantra 3

M. is reprimanded – his egotism is crushed

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Are you married?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna (*startled*): "I say, Ramlal![1] Ah me, he has already taken a wife."

M. is confused and sits speechless, hanging his head as though he were guilty of a serious offence. He thinks to himself, Is marrying so bad?

Thakur then asks, "Have you any children?"

M. can hear the beating of his own heart. He says fearfully, "Yes sir, I have children."

Thakur rebukes M. all the more, saying, "Alas, you have children too!"

M. is stunned by the blow. His egotism is being crushed.

After a while Sri Ramakrishna looks at him kindly and speaks affectionately, "See, you have some good signs. I can tell by looking at a person's eyes and forehead.

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1. Ramlal, nephew of Sri Ramakrishna and the priest of Kali Temple.

"Well, what kind of wife do you have? Is she vidyashakti or avidyashakti?"[1]

What is jnana? – image worship

M.: "Sir, she is good, but ignorant."[2]

Sri Ramakrishna (*sharply*): "And you are wise!"[3]

What jnana is and what ajnana is, M. does not know. Until now he has only known that a jnani is one who has received an education and can read books. This false notion was afterwards destroyed when he learned that to know God is jnana and not to know Him is ajnana. Thakur had said, "Do you think you have attained wisdom?" M.'s egotism again received a hard blow.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, do you believe in God with form or without form?"

M. (*confused, to himself*), Is it possible to have faith in the formless God and believe at the same time that He is with form? How can it be that while believing God to be with form, one can think of Him as formless? Can the two contradictory states coexist in the same substance? Can white things like milk also be black?

M.: "I like the formless God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's all right. Having faith in either of the two points of view is enough. To think of God as formless is quite right. Even so, don't think that only this idea is true and all others are false. Know this: that the formless God is true

1. Vidyashakti, the power of spiritual wisdom, leading to God and light; Avidyashakti is its opposite, keeping one immersed in ignorance, darkness, and bondage.
2. Ajnani.
3. Jnani.

and so is God with form. You must hold to that which you believe."

> Hearing again and again that both ideas are true, M. is speechless. Never has he read such a thing in any of his books. His egotism has been crushed for a third time, but it is not yet completely knocked out. So he advances with his reasoning a little further.

M.: "Well sir, let one believe that God is with form, but surely He is not an earthen image."

Sri Ramakrishna: "My dear sir, why earthen? It is the image of spirit!"

M. does not understand the significance of the "image of spirit." He says, "Well, should one not make it clear to those who worship images that God is not the image and that while worshiping, they should keep God in view and not worship the clay?"

Lecture and Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna (*sharply*): "It is fashionable for Calcutta people to lecture and bring others to light! How to bring light to themselves, they do not know. Who are you to teach others? The Lord of the Universe will teach – He who has made this universe of moon, sun, seasons, human beings, and beasts. He who has provided food for men and beasts, and parents to rear and love their young ones – He Himself will teach. He has made all this; will He not provide for it, too? If there is a need to know, God Himself will surely make it understood. He is the inner controller.[1] You say it is wrong to worship a clay image. Does He not know that He

1. Antaryamin.

Himself is being called upon? He is pleased with this very worship! Why should you have a headache over it? Only seek for yourself, that you may gain knowledge and develop love and devotion."

This time M.'s egotism is completely crushed. He says to himself, What he says is certainly true. Why do I need to go around preaching to others? Have I myself known God? Have I developed love and devotion for Him? It is like the proverb says: "Bidding my friend Shankara to lie down on my bed when there is no bed for myself to lie on." Knowing nothing, listening to no one, and yet going out to preach to others! It would be shameful, indeed great folly. Is this mathematics or history or literature that you can teach to others? It is the science of God! Whatever he says fully appeals to me.

This was M.'s first and last attempt to argue with Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna: "You were talking of worshiping clay images. Even if made of clay, there is need for this kind of worship. God Himself has provided various methods of worship. He who has created the universe has provided different forms to suit people with different understanding. A mother provides food so that her children get what agrees with each.

"Say a mother has five children and she has fish to cook. She makes different dishes out of it to suit each of her children. Pulao[1] with fish for one, fish with sour tamarind for another, charchari[2] for yet another, and fried fish for still another – she

1. A highly spiced fish dish of rice and meat boiled in clarified butter.
2. Dry fish with spiced vegetables soaked in oil.

prepares exactly what they like, exactly what agrees with their stomachs. Understand?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

Chapter Five

saṁsārārṇavaghore yaḥ karṇadhārasvarūpakaḥ।
namo 'stu rāmakṛṣṇāya tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ।।

[Salutations to Sri Ramakrishna, salutations to that Guru who is the pilot to take one across the deep sea of the world.]

– Vishveshwara Tantra 3

How to gain love and devotion for God

M.: "How may one fix the mind on God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "By chanting His names and glories without ceasing. And keeping the company of the holy. One must frequently go to God's devotees, or sadhus. The mind doesn't fix itself on God while living day and night in the midst of worldly activities and family life. So one must go into solitude now and then to meditate on God. In the first stage it is very hard to fix the mind on God without frequently going into solitude.

"When a plant is young, it needs a fence around it. Without the fence, goats and cows devour it.

"The mind, a solitary corner, and the forest are the places to meditate. And you must always have good thoughts in your mind. God alone is real, the eternal substance, and all else is unreal, transitory. Discriminating in this way, you will shake off attachment to the perishable things of the world."

M. (*humbly*): "How to live in the household?"

Sannyasa in the household – the way – sadhana in solitude

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do all your duties, but keep your mind fixed on God. Wife, son, father, and mother – live with them all and serve them as if they are your own, but know in your heart that they are really not yours.

"A rich man's maidservant attends to all her duties, but her mind is always on her own home in the village. She nurses her master's children as if they were her own; she calls out, 'My Rama, my Hari,' but all the while she knows full well they are not hers.

"A tortoise moves around in water, but do you know where its mind dwells? On the bank of the river, on dry land where its eggs are laid. Attend to all your worldly work, but take care that your mind rests in God.

"If you enter the world before you have acquired love and devotion for God, you will surely become entangled more and more. Misfortune, grief, and other ills of the world will make you lose your mental balance. The more you think of worldly matters, the more attachment will come.

"Rub your hands with oil before you break a jackfruit; otherwise, its milky juice will stick to your hands. First acquire the oil of love for God, and then engage in the affairs of the world.

"But to acquire love for God, solitude is needed. If you want to make butter, the curds have to be set

in a quiet corner. The curds will not set if they are disturbed. You have to sit in a quiet place, giving up all other work, and churn the curds. Only then can you get butter.

"By giving your mind to God in solitude, you gain spiritual knowledge,[1] dispassion,[2] and love for Him. But if you give the same mind to the world, it becomes coarse. In the world there is nothing but thoughts of 'lust and greed.'

"The world is like water, and the mind like milk. If milk is poured into water, it will get mixed with the water and become one with it. You will not be able to get pure milk, however much you try. But if the milk is turned into curds, the butter that is made from it will then float on water. So first get the butter of spiritual knowledge and love for God by practicing spiritual disciplines in a solitary place. This butter, when put in the water of the world, will not mix with it. It will float on its surface.

"Along with this, the practice of discrimination is necessary. 'Lust and greed' are transitory; God is the only reality. What does money give? It gives us food, clothes, and a place to live – that much, no more. It does not help us to attain God. So money cannot be the end of life. This is the process of discrimination. Do you see this?"

M.: "Yes, sir. I have recently read about discrimination in *Prabodha Chandrodaya* [a Sanskrit play]."

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1. Jnana.
2. Vairagya; non-attachment.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, discrimination. Just think, what is there in money or in a beautiful body? Think about it: the body of a beautiful woman only consists of bones, flesh, fat, urine, and excreta. Why does a man give his mind to such things and lose sight of God? Why does he forget God?"

How to see God

M.: "Sir, can God be seen?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. There is no doubt about it. Going into solitude from time to time, chanting His name and glories, practicing discrimination – these are what you have to do."

M.: "What state of mind leads to God-realization?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Cry with a deep yearning in your heart and you will see God. People shed pitchers full of tears for wife and children, they weep streams of tears for money, but who cries for God? Call out to God with a longing and yearning heart. Saying this, Thakur sings:

Cry out with yearning, O mind, and see how

Mother Shyama can withhold Herself from you!

How can Shyama stay away? How can Kali remain away?

O mind, if you are in earnest, bring bel leaves and red hibiscus flowers,

Touched with the sandal paste of devotion, and offer them at Her feet.

"A yearning heart brings the dawn; soon after, the sun is visible. After longing comes God-vision.

"You can see God if you have these three attachments combined: the attachment of a worldly man to things of the world, the attachment of a mother to her child, and the attachment of a chaste wife to her husband. If these three attachments are united, their combined power makes it possible to see God.

"The real thing is that you must love God the way a mother loves her son, a chaste wife her husband, and a worldly man the things of the world. When your love for God has the combined intensity of all these three, you will see Him.

"One should call upon God with a yearning heart. A kitten knows only how to cry out to its mother, 'Mew, mew.' Wherever the mother puts it, it remains, whether in the kitchen, on the floor, or on the bed. When it feels hurt, it simply cries 'mew, mew' and knows nothing else. Wherever the mother may be, she comes when she hears its mewing."

Chapter Six

sarvabhūtastham ātmānaṁ sarvabhūtāni cātmani ।
īkṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ ।।

[His mind being harmonized by yoga, he sees himself in all beings and all beings in himself; he sees the same in all.]

– Bhagavad Gita 6:29

Third meeting – Narendranath, Bhavanath, and M.

M. was then staying at his sister's house in Baranagore. Ever since he met Sri Ramakrishna, he had been constantly thinking of him. The same joyful

> image always appeared before his eyes as he remembered Thakur's words, sweet as nectar. He wondered to himself, How has this poor brahmin learned all these deep truths? M. had never before seen anyone explain all these things so clearly. Day and night he wondered, When shall I go and see him again?

Not long after this, at four o'clock on Sunday, 5 March, M. reaches the garden of Dakshineswar with Nepal Babu of Baranagore. He finds Sri Ramakrishna in the same room, seated on the smaller bed. The room is filled with devotees since on Sunday, they have time to come see him. M. does not yet know any of them. He takes a seat on one side of the group and watches Thakur talk to the devotees with a smile on his face.

Addressing a young man of nineteen, Thakur speaks to him joyfully about a number of things. The young man is Narendra.[1] He is a college student who often visits the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. His words are full of spirit. His eyes are bright with the look of a devotee.

M. sees that the subject of the talk is the conduct of worldly men attached to the pleasures of the world, and people who ridicule those who seek God and religion. Also how many wicked people there are in the world and how to deal with them. Such is the topic of conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "What do you say, Narendra? Worldly men say all sorts of things. But see, when an elephant walks by, many animals roar and howl and bark, but the elephant doesn't

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1. Later Swami Vivekananda.

even look at them. If someone condemns you, what will you think of him?"

Narendra: "I'll think that dogs are barking at me."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "No, my child, you mustn't go that far. Know that God is in all things. But you must mix with the good and keep a distance from the bad. God is present even in a tiger, but surely you can't hug him for that reason. (*Laughter.*) If you say, 'The tiger is also God, why should I run away?' the answer is, 'He who says, "Run away!" is also God. Why should you not listen to him?

"Listen to a story:

"A sadhu lived in a forest. He had a number of disciples. He had taught them, 'Narayana is in all things. Knowing this, offer salutations to all.' One day a disciple went out to collect firewood for the sacrificial fire. Suddenly there was a shout, 'Run! Run away wherever you can! A mad elephant is coming!' Everyone ran except this disciple. He reasoned, There is Narayana in the elephant, too, so why should I run away? Thinking this, he stood still and saluted the elephant. He started to offer prayers. The mahut (elephant driver) shouted, 'Run away, run away!' Still the disciple did not move. Finally the elephant came and seized him with its trunk. It threw him on the ground, and then went on its way. The disciple, cut and bruised, lay unconscious on the ground.

"Hearing what had happened, his guru and brother disciples came and carried him back to the

ashrama and applied medications. After some time, when he came to, one of them asked, 'Why didn't you move away when you heard that a mad elephant was coming?' He answered, 'Because our master told us that Narayana Himself is present in all living creatures. Seeing the elephant coming as Narayana, I did not leave.' His guru replied, 'My son, indeed it is true that the elephant as Narayana was coming – but, my child, Narayana as the mahut warned you! If everybody is Narayana, why did you not listen to the mahut Narayana? You should have listened to the driver's words.'

"The scriptures say, 'Apo Narayana *(*water is God).' But some water is used for worship of God and some only for washing the face, mouth, hands, and clothes. The latter water cannot be used for drinking or for worship. Similarly, Narayana is in the hearts of the unholy as well as the holy, in the hearts of devotees and non-devotees. But one cannot have dealings with the unholy and wicked or be close to them. With some, one may only have a nodding acquaintance, while with others, even that is not possible. One must live apart from such people."

A devotee: "Sir, when a bad person tries to harm us or actually does so, should we do nothing?"

The household and spirit of resisting evil

Sri Ramakrishna: "When you live in the world, to protect yourself from bad people, you must make a show of tamas. But it isn't right to harm anyone just because you think he may harm you.

"A cowherd boy used to graze his cattle in a field where a terribly venomous snake lived. Everybody was very cautious because of the danger. One day a brahmachari was passing through the field. The cowherd boys ran up to him and said, 'Revered sir, please don't go this way. There is a terribly venomous snake here.' The holy man said, 'Child, never mind. I'm not afraid of it. I know a mantra to ward off this danger.' Saying this, he went into the field. Out of fear, no cowherd boy accompanied him. And here came the snake with its hood raised, moving swiftly. But as it came near, the holy man uttered the mantra and lo! the snake fell at his feet like an earthworm. 'Well,' he asked, 'why do you go around harming others? Come here. I'll give you a mantra to repeat so you'll develop love for God. Then your desire to harm others will leave you.' Saying this, he gave the mantra to the snake. The snake bowed before the guru and asked, 'Sir, please tell me what spiritual practice I should carry out.' The guru said, 'Repeat this mantra and don't harm anyone. I will come again.' Then he left.

"Some days passed and the cowherd boys noticed that the snake no longer tried to bite them. Even when they threw stones at it, it did not react – it had become like an earthworm. One day one of the boys went to it and caught hold of its tail. He whirled it around and around and dashed it several times on the ground. The snake vomited blood and fell unconscious. It could not move. The boys thought it was dead, so they left.

"Late that night, the snake regained consciousness and slowly dragged itself with great difficulty

into its hole. Its body was broken and it had no strength to move. After a few days, when it was reduced to a mere skeleton, the snake came out of its hole during the night to look for food. Being afraid of the boys, it did not come out during the day. After its initiation with the mantra, it ceased to harm anyone. It lived as well as it could on leaves and fruits fallen on the ground.

"After almost a year had passed, the brahmachari came that way again. He looked around for the snake, but the cowherd boys said it was dead. The brahmachari found that hard to believe. He knew that the snake had received a mantra, so death was out of the question before it had seen God. He searched where he had seen it last and called out for it by the name he had given it. Hearing the voice of its guru, the snake came out of its hole and bowed down reverently before him. The man asked, 'How are you?' The snake replied, 'I'm quite well, sir.' Again he asked, 'But why are you so weak?' The snake said, 'Holy sir, you asked me not to harm anybody. So I live on leaves and fruit. Perhaps this is the reason why I have grown weak.' The snake had developed the quality of sattva,[1] you see. That's why it didn't get angry with anyone. It had forgotten that the boys had tried to kill it. The holy man said, 'Lack of food alone could not have brought you to this pass. Surely there is something else. Just think about it.' The snake then remembered that the boys had once whirled it around and around and dashed it on the ground, so it said, 'Holy sir, now I remember. One day the

1. Serenity.

cowherd boys threw me violently on the ground, but they didn't know what change had come over my mind. How could they know that I wasn't going to bite them or do any harm?' The holy man said, 'Fie! You are so stupid! You don't even know how to save yourself! What I forbade was your biting. I didn't ask you not to hiss! Why didn't you frighten them away by hissing?'

"You should hiss at bad people to frighten them so they don't harm you. But you must not inject poison into others and injure them."

Are all men equal? Their natures differ

"In the Lord's creation there are different types of creatures and plants. Among animals, there are bad as well as good. There are beasts like tigers that kill others. Among trees, some bring forth fruit as sweet as nectar, but others yield poisonous fruit. In the same way, there are good men and bad men, holy and unholy, men attached to the world, and also devotees.

"People can be divided into four classes: those bound to the world, seekers after liberation, the liberated, and the ever-free.

"The ever-free, like Narada and others, are those who live in the world for the good of mankind, to teach truth to others.

"Bound souls are attached to worldly things. They forget God and never give a thought to Him.

"Seekers after liberation struggle for liberation. But only some of them attain it.

"The liberated are not attached to 'lust and greed' – for example, sadhus and great spiritual personalities. There is no attachment to worldly things in their minds. They always meditate on the lotus feet of God.

"Suppose a net is cast into water. Some of the fish are too clever to be caught in the net. They can be likened to ever-free souls. However, most of the fish get caught. Of these, some try to escape. They are like the seekers after liberation. But not all the fish can escape. Only a few are able to leap out of the net. The boys then shout, 'Look! A big fish has escaped!' But most of the fish caught in the net don't escape – they don't even try to. What is more, they hold the net in their mouths and lie quietly, trying to hide themselves in the mud at the bottom. They think, We are quite safe now; there is no danger. They don't know that the fishermen will haul them up with a jerk and throw them out on the river bank. They may be compared to worldly men."

Worldly men – bound in fetters

"Worldly men remain bound to 'lust and greed.' Although they are bound hand and foot, they still think they can find happiness and security in the world, in 'lust and gold.' They don't know that they will only die there. When a worldly man is on his deathbed, his wife says to him, 'You are departing. What have you done for me?' Besides, the influence of maya is such that, seeing a lamp burning for a long time, a bound man says, 'Too much oil is being used! Lower the wick!' And here he is, lying on his deathbed!

"A worldly man doesn't think of God. Even when he has leisure, he either indulges in empty talk or engages himself in useless activities. He says, 'I'm not able to sit idle, so I'll plant a hedge.' When time hangs heavy, he might even start playing cards." (*All laugh*.)

Chapter Seven

yo mām ajam anādiṁ ca vetti lokamaheśvaram |
asaṁmūḍhaḥ sa martyeṣu sarvapāpaiḥ pramucyate||

[He who knows Me as unborn and beginningless, the great Lord of the worlds, is no more deluded among mortals and is freed from all evils.]

– Bhagavad Gita 10:3

The way – faith

A devotee: "Sir, is there no way out for such a worldly man?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Certainly there's a way. To now and then seek the company of holy men, and at times to meditate on God in solitude. And you should practice discrimination and pray to God: 'Grant me love and faith!'

"Once you acquire faith, your work is done. There is nothing higher than faith.

(*To Kedar*) "You have heard how powerful faith is. The Purana says that Ramachandra, the perfect incarnation of Brahman and Narayana, had to build a bridge to reach Lanka. But Hanuman had such great faith in the name of Rama that, taking

Rama's name, he was able to jump across the sea. He had no need for a bridge. (*All laugh*.)

"Bibhishana wrote Rama's name on a leaf and tied it in the folds of the cloth of a man who wanted to cross the sea. Bibhishana said to him, 'Fear not. Have faith and walk across the sea. But mind you, as soon as you lose your faith, you will drown.' The man walked easily onto the water, but he was seized with intense curiosity to see what was tied in the folds of his cloth. He untied it and saw that it was just the name of Rama written on a leaf. He said to himself, 'What! Just the name of Rama?' In the instant that he lost faith, he sank.

"One who has faith in God can be saved from the vilest of sins, no matter what he may have done – killed a cow, a brahmin, or a woman. Let him only say, 'I shall not do so again.' Then he need not be afraid of anything."

Saying this, Thakur sings:

Mother, can I but die with Durga's name upon my lips,

I shall see, O Shankari, how in the end you cannot refuse to rescue me.

Should I have killed a Brahmin or a cow, or destroyed a child in the womb, or indulged in drink, or slain a woman,

For all those heinous deeds I care not in the least; still may I aspire to Brahman.

Narendra – the homa bird

"You all see this boy. He acts one way here. When a naughty boy is in the presence of his father, he behaves meekly, as if there were a goblin present. But when he plays in the chandni, he is quite different. A boy like this belongs to the class of the

ever-perfect. They never become attached to the world. When they are a little older, they feel an awakening within the heart and move directly towards God. They come to the world to teach mankind. They have no love for the things of the world. Their minds never go toward 'lust and greed.'

"A bird called homa is mentioned in the Vedas. It lives high up in the sky. There it lays an egg, and the egg begins to fall. But it is so high up that it goes on falling for days. During the fall, a young chick breaks out of the shell with its eyes open and its wings ready for flight. When it sees the earth fast approaching, to avoid being smashed on the ground, it suddenly swoops upward toward its mother high above."

Narendra rises and leaves. Kedar, Prankrishna, M., and many others remain in the room.

Sri Ramakrishna: "You see, Narendra excels in everything – singing, playing musical instruments, reading, and writing. The other day he had a discussion with Kedar. He just destroyed Kedar's arguments. (*Thakur and all the others laugh*.) (*To M.*) Is there a book in English on reasoning?"

M.: "Yes, sir. It's called *logic* in English."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, give me some idea of it."

M. now finds himself in a difficult situation. He says, "One part of logic is reasoning from the general proposition to a particular. For example: All men will die. Pundits are men. So pundits will die.

"Another part deals with reasoning from a particular illustration or event to a general proposition. Such as: This crow is black; that crow is black; all the crows I see are black; hence, all crows are black.

"But to arrive at a conclusion in such a way is open to fallacy. When you're looking for crows, you might find a white one somewhere. Another illustration is: Where there is rain, there must be clouds. The general proposition is that rain comes from clouds. Yet another illustration is: This man has thirty-two teeth. That man has the same number. Everybody we see has thirty-two teeth. Thus all men have thirty-two teeth.

"There are such general propositions in English logic."

Sri Ramakrishna listened to it all but, since his mind was elsewhere, there was no further talk on the subject.

Chapter Eight

śrutivipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati niścalā ।
samādhāvacalābuddhis tadā yogam avāpsyasi ।।

[When your intellect, perplexed by what you have heard, has become poised and firmly fixed in the Self; then you shall attain yoga.]

– Bhagavad Gita 2:53

In samadhi

The meeting ends. The devotees walk around here and there. M. strolls around the panchavati and other places. Returning to Sri Ramakrishna's room about five o'clock, he comes upon a strange sight on the small verandah north of the room:

Sri Ramakrishna is standing still. Narendra is singing a hymn, and devotees are standing around. M. is charmed with the song. Other than Thakur's, never and nowhere has he heard such a sweet voice. As he looks at Thakur, he becomes speechless. Thakur is standing motionless, his eyes unmoving. It is difficult to say whether or not he is breathing. When asked, a devotee tells him that this state is known as samadhi (superconscious awareness).

M. has never seen or heard of anything like this. He wonders to himself, Is it possible that the thought of God can make one lose outer-consciousness? How great must one's love and faith be to enter into such a state!

The song is as follows:

Meditate, O my mind, on the Lord Hari,
The essence of consciousness, free from all impurity.

Without equal is His glory, enchanting is His form!
How beloved is He in the hearts of His devotees.

The fresh beauty of newly awakened love
Casts into shade the effulgence of a million moons!

His glory flashes like lightning,
And His devotees' hair stands on end in sheer delight.

Sri Ramakrishna is deeply touched when this line of the hymn is chanted. The hair on his body stands on end. His eyes swim with tears of joy. Now and then he smiles, as though he were seeing

something. What vision of unequaled beauty might he be enjoying that would put into shade the effulgence of a million moons? Is this what is called the vision of God? What must the intensity of spiritual discipline and austerities be, how much love and faith must one have, to bring about such a vision!

The song goes on:

With a mind made pure and eyes sparkling with love,
Worship His holy feet in the lotus of your heart,
And gaze upon the peerless beauty of His beloved form.

That bewitching smile once more! His body becomes motionless in the same manner. Eyes fixed, it seems as if he is beholding a strange inner vision, seeing which he is swimming in supreme joy.

The song comes to an end. Narendra sings:

Spellbound in love divine, O mind, be ever immersed in Him, the fount of consciousness and love's sweet bliss.

Carrying in his heart this unique picture of samadhi and the bliss of love, M. leaves for home. Intoxicating sweet music bubbles up from time to time in his heart:

Spellbound in love divine, O mind, be ever immersed in Him, the fount of consciousness and love's sweet bliss.

Chapter Nine

yaṁ labdhvā cāparaṁ lābhaṁ manyate nādhikaṁ tataḥ |
yasmin sthito na duḥkhena guruṇāpi vicālyate ||

[And having gained which, he thinks there is no greater gain than that, therein established he is not shaken by even the profoundest affliction.]

– Bhagavad Gita 6:22

Fourth visit – joy and fun with Narendra, Bhavanath, and others

The next day, 6 March, is also a holiday. M. has come again at three o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller bed in his room. A mat is spread on the floor, on which Narendra, Bhavanath, and two other devotees are sitting. Some are young men, nineteen or twenty years old. A smile plays on Thakur's face as he talks happily with the devotees.

Seeing M. enter the room, Thakur laughs loudly and says to the devotees, "Look, he's here again!" They all join him in laughter. M. comes in and salutes Sri Ramakrishna, prostrating himself on the floor. Then he takes a seat. He had formerly saluted Thakur with folded hands, in the manner of English-educated people, but today he has learned to salute by lying face-down before him. As he sits down, Sri Ramakrishna tells Narendra and the other disciples what has made him laugh.

"Listen, some opium was given to a peacock at four o'clock in the afternoon. The next day the same peacock arrived punctually at four in the afternoon.

It had become an opium addict, so it came at the same time for another dose." (*All laugh*.)

> M. thinks to himself, He is right. I go back home, but my mind, day and night, is fixed on him, thinking, When shall I see him? When shall I see him? It's as if someone has pulled me here. I can't go anywhere else; even if I want to, I have to come here.

While M. is thinking this, Thakur amuses himself with the young men as if he were their age. Peals of laughter begin to fill the room, making it a centre of joy.

> M. is speechless as he looks at this unique character. He says to himself, Is this the same person I saw yesterday in samadhi, absorbed in a bliss of divine love that I have never seen before? Is this the same man behaving like an ordinary person today? Is it he who scolded me on my first visit, teaching me that God with form and the formless God are both true? Didn't he tell me that God alone is real and all else in the world is transitory? Didn't he advise me to live in the world like a maidservant?

Thakur Sri Ramakrishna is having great fun and glances at M. every now and then. He sees M. sitting in silence. Addressing Ramlal, he says, "You see, he's a little older, therefore somewhat serious. These people are laughing and having fun, but he sits quietly." M. was then about twenty-seven years old.

During the conversation, they talk of Hanuman, the great devotee. There is a picture of Hanuman on the wall of Thakur's room. Thakur says, "Just think of Hanuman's state of mind! He wanted neither wealth nor honour nor bodily comforts. He longed only for God. When he was running away

with the Brahmastra (a heavenly weapon of Brahma) taken from the crystalline pillar, Mandodari showed him many kinds of fruit. She thought that, tempted by fruit, he might climb down and drop the weapon. But Hanuman could not be tricked. He sang:

> Do I want for any fruits?
>
> The fruit that makes my life fruitful, that I have,
>
> For in my heart is planted the tree that bears the fruit of liberation – Sri Rama.
>
> Sitting beneath Sri Rama's wish-fulfilling tree,[1] whatever fruit I desire is mine.
>
> But the fruit of which you speak, my friend – for that common fruit I bargain not.
>
> I depart, leaving to you the bitter fruit of your deeds.

In samadhi

Singing this song, Thakur again goes into samadhi. Again his body is motionless, his eyes are fixed, and he sits still. He is seated the same as in the photograph. Only a moment ago the devotees were laughing and having fun; now they all gaze silently at him in this unique state. It is the second time that M. has observed Thakur in the state of samadhi. After some time a change comes: his body is relaxed and a smile plays on his face. His senses begin to function again in the normal way. Shedding tears of joy from the corners of his eyes, he repeats the name, "Rama! Rama!"

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1. Kalpataru.

M. says to himself, Is this the same great saint who was having such fun with the boys? Then he acted like a five-year-old child.

Returning to his normal state of mind, Thakur behaves like an ordinary man again. He says to M. and Narendra, "I would like to hear both of you talk in English. Question and reason among yourselves."

M. and Narendra both laugh at his words. They talk a little, but in Bengali. It is not possible for M. to argue any more in front of Thakur. His entire tendency to argue has been erased by Thakur's grace. How can he argue now? Thakur presses them once again, but talk in English does not come about.

Chapter Ten

tvam akṣaraṁ paramaṁ veditavyaṁ tvam asya viśvasya paraṁ nidhānam ।
tvam avyayaḥ śāśvatadharmagoptā sanātanas tvaṁ puruṣo mato me ।।

[You are the imperishable, the Supreme Being to be realized. You are the great resting place of this universe; You are the imperishable guardian of the eternal dharma. I deem You to be the ancient Purusha.]

– Bhagavad Gita 11:18

With his intimate disciples – 'who am I?'

It is five o'clock. Many devotees have gone, each one to his own home. Only M. and Narendra have remained. Narendra goes to the Hanspukur and the jhautala with a pitcher for washing. M. walks on

the path around the temple. After a while, he goes toward the Hanspukur near the kuthi. He finds Sri Ramakrishna standing on the steps of the staircase south of the tank. Narendra has washed his face and stands with the pitcher in his hands. Thakur is saying, "Look, you must come here more often. You are a newcomer, you see. After the first acquaintance, people meet more often, like a newly wedded husband. (*Narendra and M. laugh*.) Won't you come?" Narendra belongs to the Brahmo Samaj. He laughs and says, "Yes sir, I will try."

They all go back to Thakur's room by way of the kuthi path. Near the kuthi, Thakur says to M., "You know, peasants go to market to buy bullocks. They know a good bullock from a bad one easily. They touch the tail. Some bullocks lie down on the ground as soon as their tails are touched. Peasants don't buy such bullocks. They choose only those who spring up with a start as soon as their tails are touched. Narendra is a bullock of the latter class. There is a lot of mettle in him." Saying this, Thakur smiles and adds, "But there are so many who are soft, like puffed rice soaked in milk – no strength within, no grit. Soft and slippery."

It is dusk. Thakur is meditating on God. He says to M., "Go and talk to Narendra and tell me what sort of boy he is."

The arati is over. After quite some time, M. meets Narendra west of the chandni. They talk for a while. Narendra says, "I belong to the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. I am a college student," and so forth.

When night falls, M. decides to leave. Something, however, seems to hold him back, so when he leaves Narendra, he looks around for Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur's songs have charmed his heart and mind. He longs to hear him sing again. At last, he finds him alone, pacing up and down the natmandir in front of Mother Kali's temple. There are brilliant lights burning on both sides of the Mother in Her temple. The vast natmandir, however, has only one light, and it is rather dim, blending light and darkness.

M. is beside himself, spellbound like a snake, when he hears Thakur's songs. He asks Thakur humbly, "Will there be any more songs today?"

Thakur thinks for a moment and says, "No, there will be no more singing today." As he says this, it seems as if he is reminded of something and says immediately, "But you can do this. I'm going to Balaram's house in Calcutta. Come there. There you will have songs."

M.: "All right, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You know him, Balaram Bose?"

M.: "No, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Balaram Bose. His house is in Bosepara."

M.: "Very well, sir. I will find it."

Sri Ramakrishna (*as he walks in the natmandir with M.*): "Well, let me ask you something: what do you think of me?"

M. remains silent.

Thakur says again, "What do you feel? How many annas[1] of knowledge do I have?"

M.: "Annas! I don't understand. But never have I seen anywhere such knowledge, such love for God, such faith, such dispassion,[2] and such universality."

Thakur Sri Ramakrishna laughs.

After this conversation, M. bows and takes his leave.

He comes to the main gate but, remembering something, returns immediately. He goes to Sri Ramakrishna in the natmandir. Thakur is still walking up and down in that dim light – alone, with no companion, like a lion, the king of beasts, who walks alone in the forest. Atmarama,[3] the lion rejoices in being alone, in moving around companionless. M. stands, speechless, and again looks at the great man.

Sri Ramakrishna: "You've come back."

M.: "Sir, they may not let me enter the rich man's house. So I think I won't go there. It is here that I'll come to see you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, my dear sir, why not? You can mention my name. Say that you want to see me. Someone there will surely lead you to me."

Saying, "As you please," M. bows down again and leaves.

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1. Anna – sixteen annas make one rupee.
2. Vairagya; non-attachment.
3. Rejoicing in the Self within.

Section II

Sri Ramakrishna's Steamer Trip with Keshab Chandra Sen In Joy and Conversation

Chapter One

Thakur Sri Ramakrishna – in samadhi

Today is the day of the Kojagar Lakshmi Puja,[1] Friday, 27 October 1882. Thakur is seated in his room at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar, talking with Vijay Goswami and Haralal. Someone comes in to tell him that Keshab Sen has come in a steamer and is waiting for him at the ghat.

Keshab's disciples salute Sri Ramakrishna and say, "Sir, the steamer has arrived. Please come for a little excursion. Keshab Sen is on board and has sent us to invite you."

It is 4 o'clock when Thakur boards the steamer from a smaller boat. Vijay accompanies him. As Sri Ramakrishna steps aboard, he loses outer consciousness and goes into samadhi.

M., who had boarded the steamer at 3 o'clock in Calcutta, looks at Thakur in samadhi. He is very eager to witness the meeting between Thakur and

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1. Kojagar Lakshmi Puja: the full-moon night of the dark fortnight of Aswin. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, is worshiped in North India on Diwali night. In Bengal Lakshmi is worshiped fifteen days prior to Diwali. On Diwali, the festival of lights, people worship Kali in Bengal.

Keshab, to observe their joy and to hear their conversation.

By his saintly character and eloquence, Keshab has captivated the minds of many young Bengali men like M. Regarding Keshab as their own, many have given him their heart's love. Keshab is British-educated and well versed in English philosophy and literature. He has often described the worship of gods and goddesses as idolatry. It is rather strange that such a man looks upon Sri Ramakrishna with reverence and admiration and visits him occasionally. M. and others are curious to find on what common ground they agree. Though Thakur believes in the formless God, he also holds that God is with form. He meditates on Brahman, but at the same time worships gods and goddesses with flowers, incense, and other offerings. Then again, diving deep in intense love for God, he sings and dances. He sits on his bed, which is covered with a bedspread. He wears a red-bordered dhoti, shirt, socks, and shoes, but he is not a householder. His prevailing mood[1] is entirely that of a sannyasin, hence people call him a paramahamsa. On the other hand, Keshab believes in God without form, has a wife and children, and lives the life of a householder, delivering lectures in English, publishing a paper, and attending to worldly affairs.

Toward the east are a cement ghat and the chandni, the portal of the temple. On either side of the chandni stands a row of twelve Shiva temples, six on the right and six on the left. On the canvas of the blue autumn sky are visible the pinnacle of the temple of Bhavatarini and to the north, the top of the trees of the panchavati and the willowgrove. Near the bakultala is a music pavilion and to the south of the Kali Temple is another music pavilion. Between them are garden paths and rows of flowering plants. The blue of the sky is reflected in the holy waters of the

1. Bhava.

Ganges[1] and a serene atmosphere prevails. The same serenity is in the hearts of the Brahmo devotees. Above is the beautiful, dark blue, infinite sky; in front, the beautiful temple; and below, the holy water of the Ganges.

On the banks of the sacred river Aryan rishis have meditated on God since ancient times. Now again a special Great Soul[2] has come, an incarnation of the Eternal Religion.[3] It is not the fortune of most men to observe such a sight. Seeing such a great soul in samadhi, who would not but feel the stirring of love for God? Whose stone-like heart would not melt?

Chapter Two

vāsāṁsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya navāni gṛhṇāti naro
'parāṇi |
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāni anyāni saṁyāti navāni
dehī ||

[As a man, having cast away old garments, puts on new ones, so, having cast away worn-out bodies, the soul enters into new ones.]

– Bhagavad Gita 2:22

In samadhi – the imperishable Atman – Pavhari Baba

The boat has come alongside the steamer. There is a big crowd, all eager to see Sri Ramakrishna. Keshab is very anxious that Thakur be brought safely aboard the steamer. With great difficulty he is brought back to normal consciousness and taken inside the cabin. He is still in divine ecstasy and

1. Jahnavi.
2. Mahapurusha.
3. Sanatana Dharma.

leans on a devotee as he walks. As he enters the cabin, his feet move without his awareness. Keshab and the other devotees salute him, but he has no sense-consciousness. Inside the cabin are some chairs and a table. Thakur is made to sit on a chair. Keshab sits on another, and Vijay also has taken a seat. Other devotees sit wherever they find a place, even on the bare floor. Many don't find a place but peer in from outside. Thakur, after sitting down, again goes into samadhi, absolutely devoid of outer consciousness. All eyes are on him. Keshab sees that so many people are in the cabin that Thakur might need more air. As the air in the room is stuffy because of the crowd of people, Keshab opens the windows.

Keshab is also a little embarrassed to see Vijay, who had left the Brahmo Samaj and joined the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj instead. Vijay spoke against many of Keshab's activities, such as the early marriage of his daughter. Keshab leaves his seat to open a window of the cabin.

The Brahmo devotees look fixedly at Sri Ramakrishna. He comes down from samadhi but is still fully absorbed in divine fervour.[1] He speaks in a voice that is hardly audible, "Mother, why have You brought me here? Shall I be able to save them from their prison?"

> Does Thakur look upon men of the world as though they are in prison, unable to come out, unable to see the light outside? All of them are bound hand and foot by worldly affairs. They only see the things that are within their prison and think the aim of life is only to

1. Bhava.

enjoy physical comfort, worldly work, "lust and greed." Is it for this reason that Thakur says, "Mother, why have You brought me here? Shall I be able to free them from their prison?"

Thakur gradually regains outer consciousness. Nil Madhava of Ghazipur and a Brahmo devotee begin to talk about Pavhari Baba.

Brahmo devotee (*to Thakur*): "Sir, they have all seen Pavhari Baba. He lives in Ghazipur. He is another holy man like yourself."

Even now Thakur is not in a position to speak. He smiles gently.

Brahmo devotee (*to Thakur*): "Sir, Pavhari Baba has your photograph in his room."

Thakur smiles and says, pointing to his body, "This pillow case!"

Chapter Three

yat sāṅkhyaiḥ prāpyate sthānaṁ tadyogair api
gamyate।
ekaṁ sāṅkhyaṁ ca yogaṁ ca yaḥ paśyati sa
paśyati ।।

[The state reached by the jnani is also attained by the yogi. He indeed sees rightly who sees that jnana and yoga are one.]

– Bhagavad Gita 5:5

Harmony of jnana yoga, bhakti yoga, and karma yoga

The pillow and its pillow case – the soul and the body. Is Thakur saying that the body is perishable, that it won't last, that only the soul within the body is imperishable? So what is the use of having a

photograph of the body? The body is transitory. Why have regard for it? Rather, it is right to worship only the antaryamin, God who is present within the human heart.

Thakur has returned partially to the normal state of consciousness. He says, "But there is one thing. The heart of the devotee is His dwelling place. It may be that God is manifest in all things, but He is manifest in a special sense in the heart of a devotee of God. For example, a landlord can be seen any place on his estate. Still, people say that he is usually seen in a particular drawing room. The heart of the devotee is the Lord's drawing room." (*All rejoice.*)

One Lord with different names –
the jnani, the yogi, and the devotee

"The same Being whom jnanis call Brahman (the Absolute) is called Atman (Universal Soul) by yogis and Bhagavan (Personal God with divine attributes) by devotees.

"A brahmin is one and the same person. When he worships, he is called a priest; when employed in the kitchen, he is called a brahmin cook. The jnani holds to jnana yoga by reasoning, 'Not this, not this.' That is, Brahman is neither this nor that, neither the individual soul nor the external world. When, as a result of this reasoning, the mind becomes steady, it vanishes, and one goes into samadhi. Then one attains brahmajnana.[1] The knower of Brahman truly realizes that Brahman is real and the world unreal; names and forms are all

1. Knowledge of the Absolute.

but dreams. What Brahman is cannot be expressed in words, nor can He be said to be a person.

"Jnanis say the same as the Vedantists. But devotees accept all the states of consciousness. They look upon the waking state as real, and they do not consider the external world a dream. Devotees say that this world is the glory of God. The sky, the stars, the sun, the moon, the mountains, the ocean, men, birds, and beasts – all are created by God. These are His 'riches.' He is both within the core of the heart and He is without. The superior devotee says, 'God Himself has become the twenty-four categories[1] – living beings and the universe.' The devotee does not want to become sugar, but to taste it. (*All laugh*.)

"Do you know how a devotee feels? 'Oh Lord, You are the Master, I am Your servant. You are my Mother, I am Your child. And again, You are both my Mother and Father. You are the whole, I am Your part.' The devotee doesn't like to say, 'I am Brahman.'

"The yogi[2] seeks to see the Paramatman. His aim is union of the embodied soul with the

1. The twenty-four categories or cosmic principles enunciated in the Samkhya Philosophy are: *mahat*, cosmic intelligence; *buddhi*, the discriminating faculty; *ahamkara*, the sense of ego; *manas*/mind-stuff/*chitta*, the recording faculty; five organs of sense-perception (hearing, touch, sight, taste, smell); five organs of action (hands, feet, speech, organ of excretion, organ of generation); five *tanmatras* (sound-potential, touch-potential, sight-potential, taste-potential, smell-potential), the finer materials of the gross elements which, combining and recombining produce the five gross elements (ether/akasha/space, air, fire, water, and earth).
2. The aspirant who seeks union with God through raja yoga, the path of meditation.

Supreme Self.[1] The yogi withdraws his mind from worldly objects and tries to fix it on the Paramatman. So to begin with, he meditates on Him in solitude, in a fixed posture, with a concentrated mind.

"But It is one and the same Substance. The difference is only in name. He who is Brahman is Himself the Atman and also God. He is the Brahman of the Brahmajnani,[2] the Paramatman of the yogi,[3] and the Lord of the devotee."[4]

Chapter Four

tvameva sūkśmā tvaṁ sthūlā vyaktāvyaktasva-
rūpiṇī|
nirākārāpi sākārā kastvaṁ veditum arhati||

[You are the subtle and You are the gross; You, O Mother, are manifest as well as unmanifest. You are both with form and formless. Who has the capacity to know You?]

– Mahanirvana Tantra 4:15

Harmony of Veda and Tantra – glory of the Primordial Power

The steamer is on its way to Calcutta. Those who are having the darshan of Sri Ramakrishna and listening to his nectar-like words in the cabin are not even conscious of the movement of the steamer. Does a bee buzz when it rests on a flower?

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1. Paramatman.
2. Monist.
3. The seeker of union.
4. Dualist.

Dakshineswar, with its beautiful Kali temple, has slowly vanished from sight. As the steamer plows through the holy waters of the Ganges that reflect the blue firmament above, the waves are broken into crests of foam, making a rushing sound. But the murmurs of the waves are now lost on the ears of the devotees. Spellbound, they gaze at the smiling, joyful, sweet face and loving eyes of this wonderful yogi. They see in him an all-renouncing and loving vairagi[1] intoxicated with love for God and knowing nothing other than God. In the meantime Sri Ramakrishna talks to them.

Sri Ramakrishna: "The followers of non-dualistic Vedanta say that creation, preservation, dissolution, living beings, and the world are all playful manifestations[2] of Shakti (the Divine Power). If you reason it out, you will find that they are all illusory, like dreams. Brahman alone is the Reality, all else is unreal. Shakti is also like a dream, unreal.

"But you may reason a thousand times and you will not go beyond the jurisdiction of Shakti without attaining the state of samadhi. 'I am meditating,' 'I am thinking' – all this is within the jurisdiction of Shakti.

"That's why Brahman and Shakti are inseparable. Belief in one implies belief in the other – like fire and its burning power. If you consider fire, you must consider its burning power. Fire cannot be thought of apart from its burning power, nor can its burning power be thought of apart from the fire. The sun's rays cannot be conceived of apart

1. One who is dispassionate for everything but God.
2. Lila.

from the sun, nor can the sun be conceived of apart from its rays.

"What is milk like? Well, it is something white. Its whiteness cannot be conceived of apart from the milk, nor can the milk be conceived of apart from its whiteness.

"Thus, Shakti cannot be thought of apart from Brahman, nor can Brahman be thought of apart from Shakti. Nitya (the Absolute) and lila (the relative phenomenal world) cannot be thought of apart from each other.

"The Primordial Divine Energy[1] creates, preserves, and dissolves. She is known as Kali (the Mother of the universe). Kali is Brahman and Brahman is Kali, one and the same substance. When She is inactive – neither creating, nor preserving, nor destroying – I call her Brahman. When She performs all these activities, I call Her Kali, I call Her Shakti. But the Being is the same, only the names and forms are different. For example – jal, water, and pani. A reservoir may have three or four ghats. At one ghat Hindus drink water and they call it jal. At another ghat Muslims drink water and they call it pani. At another ghat the English drink water and call it water. These three are one and the same. Only the names are different. Some call Him Allah, some God, some Brahman, some Kali, again some call Him Rama, Hari, Jesus, and Durga."

Keshab: "Please tell us in what different ways Kali manifests Herself."

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1. Adya Shakti.

Talk with Keshab – Mahakali and mode of creation

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "She plays in various ways. She Herself is Mahakali (the Goddess, unconditioned, Absolute, without form), Nityakali (the everlasting Goddess), Shmasanakali (Goddess of the cremation ground), Rakshakali (the Goddess that blesses and is ready to preserve) and Shyamakali (the Mother of dark blue complexion, the consort of Shiva, the God of eternity and infinity). The Tantras speak of Mahakali and Nityakali. When there was no creation, no moon, no sun, no planets, no earth – nothing but deep darkness – then there was only the formless Divine Mother Mahakali living with Mahakala.

"Shyamakali has a very tender heart. She is the bestower of fearlessness. She is worshiped in households. In times of epidemics, famine, earthquakes, drought, and floods, you should worship Rakshakali. Shmasanakali has the form of destruction. She lives in the midst of dead bodies, jackals, and dakinis and yoginis[1] in cremation grounds. Streams of blood pour from Her mouth. She wears a garland of skulls around Her neck, and at her waist She wears a girdle of human hands. At the time of the total dissolution of the world,[2] the Mother preserves all the seeds of creation, just as the mistress of the house has a hodgepodge pot in which she keeps things of all kinds. (*Keshab and the others laugh.*)

1. The spirits of destruction.
2. Mahapralaya.

(*Smiling*) "Yes, my friend, the mistress of the house does have such a pot in her possession. In it she keeps sea-foam in a solid state, small packets containing the seeds of cucumber, pumpkin, gourd, and so on. All types of seeds are kept carefully. She brings them out when needed. In the same way the Divine Mother keeps all the seeds at the time of the dissolution of the world. After the creation, the Primordial Divine Energy lives very much in the world. Giving birth to the world, She lives within it. The Vedas talk of the Urnanabhi – the spider and its web. The spider creates a web out of itself and then lives in that same web. The Lord is both the container and the contents of the world."

Kali is Brahman – with form and without form

"Is Kali dark? She seems to be of dark complexion because She is far off. When you know Her, She does not appear dark.

"The sky appears to be blue because of distance. When seen up close, it has no colour. Sea water appears blue from a distance. When you go near it and take some in the palm of your hand, it has no colour."

Saying this, drunk with the wine of divine love, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing a song:

> Infinite is the garment that She wears! She illumines the lotus of the heart!

Chapter Five

tribhir guṇamayair bhāvair ebhiḥ sarvam idaṁ
jagat।
mohitaṁ nābhijānāti mām ebhyaḥ param
avyayam ।।

[Deluded by the three gunas, this world does not know Me, who am beyond them and immutable.]

– Bhagavad Gita 7:13

Why does this world exist?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab and others*): "She is the creator of both bondage and liberation. Due to Her maya (illusion), worldly man is bound with the chains of 'lust and greed.' And then he is liberated by Her mercy and grace. She is the Being who takes bound souls across the sea of the world by removing their fetters."

Saying this, Thakur sings a song by Ramprasad in a voice sweeter than the gods of the heavens[1] who sing the glories of the Most High:

In the world's bustling marketplace, O Shyama, You fly kites that soar on the wind of hope, held fast by maya's string,

Kites made of bone, nerve, and skin, all fashioned from the gunas three. How intricate is their workmanship!

With worldliness have You imbued their strings, rubbed with a paste of powdered glass to make them sharp and strong.

Among a hundred thousand kites only one or two break free. And then, O Mother, how you laugh and clap your hands!

1. Gandharvas.

> Says Ramprasad, A kite set free will swiftly ride the favouring wind across this world's ocean and soon alight on the other shore.

"The Mother is always in Her sportive mood. This world is Her sport. She has Her own way and She is full of joy. She liberates only one among millions."

A Brahmo devotee: "Sir, She can free everyone if She so desires. Why has She bound us with the chains of the world?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is Her pleasure! It is Her desire to sport with all this. If a player touches the "granny" (in the game of hide and seek), he no longer has to run about. If all the players touch her, how will the game continue? If everyone should touch the "granny," she would be unhappy. The "granny" is happy for the game to continue. That's why She (the Mother of the Universe) is happy and claps Her hands when She cuts the string of one or two kites (bound souls) out of a hundred thousand. (*All laugh*.)

"With a wink of Her eye, She has directed the mind to go and enjoy the world. How can it be the fault of the mind? Again, by Her grace, when She turns that mind from the clutches of worldliness, one is liberated. Then the mind goes to Her lotus feet."

Thakur sings, assuming the position of a man of the world, expressing his complaint to the Divine Mother:

> This is the grief that weighs on my heart: though You, my Mother, are here and I am wide awake, thieves of passion rob my house.

> Time and again I resolve to repeat Your holy name, yet at the proper hour forget. Now I understand: this is all Your trick!
>
> As You have not given, so have You not received. Am I to blame? Had You but given, surely You would have received. Out of Your own gifts would I have given to You.
>
> Glory and infamy, the bitter and the sweet – all these are Yours. O Mother, ever immersed in your own sweet bliss, why do you break my tender feelings?
>
> Says Ramprasad, You have given me this mind and turned it, with a wink, to seek enjoyment in the world. And so I wander, as if cursed by an evil eye, taking the bitter for the sweet and the unreal for the real.

"Baffled by Her delusion, man has become worldly. Ramprasad says, 'You have given me this mind and have turned it, with a wink, to seek enjoyment in the world.'"

Instruction about karma yoga – the world and selfless work[1]

A Brahmo devotee: "Sir, isn't it possible to realize God without renouncing everything?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Of course. Why do you have to renounce everything? You are fine and happy as you are. You are all right at 'do, re, mi' (lower notes of the musical scale). (*All laugh*.) Do you know the game of nax (a game of cards)? I have been 'burnt.' I have scored too many times, so I am out of the game. You are very clever. Some of you are at ten points, some at six, and others at five (out of the seventeen needed to win). You didn't score more, so you have not been 'burnt' like me. The game is going on nicely! (*Everybody laughs*.)

1. Nishkama karma.

"Truly, I tell you, there is nothing wrong in living as a householder, as you are. However, you have to fix your mind on God. Otherwise, it won't do. Do your work with one hand and hold onto God with the other. When you finish your work, you will hold God with both hands.

"It is the mind that matters. If the mind is bound, you are bound; if the mind is free, you are free. The mind gets dyed in the colour into which it is dipped. It is just like a laundered white cloth. You can dip it in any colour – red, blue, or green. It gets the colour you dip it into. Just see, if you study a little English, you start speaking English in spite of yourself: Foot-fut, it-mit. (*All laugh.*) And also putting on shoes (English boots), whistling and singing – all these actions follow. If a pundit studies Sanskrit, he starts quoting slokas. If the mind is kept in bad company, it adopts the same style of conversation and thoughts. If you keep it in the company of devotees, and if you meditate on God, then talk about God will follow.

"It is, indeed, the mind that matters. You have a wife on one side and a child on the other. The attraction for the wife is of one kind, the affection for the child is another. But the mind is the same."

Chapter Six

sarvadharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja।
ahaṁ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣyayiṣyāmi mā
śucaḥ।।

[Relinquishing all duties, take refuge in Me alone. I shall liberate you from all sins; grieve not.] – Bhagavad Gita 18:66

Instruction to Brahmos – Christianity, Brahmo Samaj, and the concept of sin

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Brahmo devotees*): "It is the mind that binds and it is the mind that liberates. I am a free soul, I may live in the household or in the forest, there is no bondage for me. I am a child of the Lord, the son of the King of Kings; who will bind me then? When bitten by a snake, if you say with con-viction, 'There is no poison!' you are rid of the venom. In the same way, if you say emphatically, 'I am not bound, I am free!' you become so. You become liberated."

The earlier story of his life – Sri Ramakrishna listens to the Bible – Krishnakishore's faith

"Someone gave me a book on Christianity. I asked him to read it to me. It contained sin and sin alone. (*To Keshab*) Your Brahmo Samaj also speaks of sin and sin alone. One who constantly says, 'I am bound, I am bound,' that rascal really becomes bound! He who repeats day and night, 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner,' does become a sinner.

"One should have such faith in the name of God that one feels: 'I have chanted His name. How can I still be a sinner? What sin is there for me? What bondage for me?' Krishnakishore is a pious Hindu, a brahmin who worships the Lord with single-minded devotion. Once he went to Vrindavan. Walking around one day, he felt thirsty. He came to a well where a man was standing. He said to the man, 'Brother, will you please give me some water? Of what caste are you?' The man replied, 'Revered sir, I belong to a low caste – a cobbler.'

Krishnakishore said, 'Just say "Shiva" and then draw water for me.'

"By chanting the name of God, both the body and mind become pure.

"Why talk of sin and hell? Just say but once, 'I shall not repeat the wrongs I have done,' and have faith in His name."

Thakur, overwhelmed with love, sings of the power of God's name.

Mother, can I but die with Durga's name upon my lips,

I shall see, O Shankari, how in the end You cannot refuse to rescue me?[1]

"I prayed to my Divine Mother for pure love of God. Holding flowers in my hands I offered them at Her lotus feet and said, 'O Mother, take Your sin and Your merit, and grant that I may have only pure love for You. Take Your knowledge and take Your ignorance, and grant me pure love for You. Here is Your purity, and here Your impurity; grant me pure love. Take Your righteousness[2] and Your un-righteousness,[3] and grant me pure love.'"

(*To the Brahmo devotees*) "Listen to a song by Ramprasad."

Come, O mind, let us go for a walk to Kali, the wish-fulfilling tree, and gather there the four fruits of life.[4]

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1. For complete song see Section I, Chapter VII of this book.
2. Dharma.
3. Adharma.
4. Four fruits: Dharma (good works), artha (wealth), kama (desires), moksha (liberation).

Of your two wives, Desire[1] and Dispassion,[2] take only Dispassion along, and ask her eldest son, Discrimination,[3] for the truth about Reality.

When will you lie down happily between your wives, Purity and Defilement? When you see no difference between these two, then shall you see the Divine Mother Kali.

Drive out your parents, Ego and Ignorance, and should Delusion attempt to drag you into its pit, hold fast to the post of Patience.

Tie the goats of Virtue and Vice to the post of Unconcern, and should they become unruly, kill them both with the sword of knowledge.

Admonish, O mind, the children of your first wife, Desire, and tell them to keep their distance. Should they not obey you, then drown them in the sea of knowledge.

Ramprasad says: If you can do this, you will render a proper account to the Lord of Death, and I shall be pleased to call you my dear one, a mind after my own heart.

"Why should God-realization not be possible while living in a household? King Janaka realized God. This world is a 'structure of dreams,' Ramprasad said. After attaining love and devotion at His lotus feet:

The world is indeed a source of joy, so let me eat, drink, and be merry!

Was King Janaka in any way below a holy man who has given up the world?

Oh no, he was loyal to both matter and Spirit, having realized God while he drank his cup of milk. (*All laugh*.)

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1. Pravritti.
2. Nivritti.
3. Viveka.

Brahmo Samaj and King Janaka – the way of the household – to live in solitude and discrimination

"But one cannot become King Janaka all at once. King Janaka performed austerity in solitude for a long time. Even while living in the family, one must go into solitude at times. It's good if one can cry for God even for three days in solitude, away from home. But even if a man goes into solitude for a day when he gets the opportunity, and thinks of Him, that too is good. People shed pitchers full of tears for wife and children, but who cries for God, tell me? One should go into solitude at times and perform spiritual practices[1] to realize God. In the beginning there are many difficulties in making the mind steady while attending to all the duties of the world. The mind, in the initial stage, is like a young tree on the footpath; it may be eaten by goats or cows. A fence is needed to protect it. When, however, the trunk grows big and strong, no fence is needed. Then even an elephant tied to the trunk will not harm it.

"Take the disease of typhoid. There is a pot of water and tamarind pickles in the room where a patient is lying. If you want to cure this patient, you'll have to remove him from the room. A worldly man is a typhoid patient, worldly things are pots of water, and the desire for sense enjoyments is his thirst. The mouth begins to water at the mere thought of tamarind pickles. They should not be placed near the patient. Such things are present in the household – the company of a woman and so on.

1. Sadhana.

That is why living in solitude is necessary for a cure.

"One can enter family life after attaining discrimination and dispassion.[1] In the ocean of the world are the crocodiles of passion – anger and so forth. If you enter the water after smearing your body with turmeric, you need not fear the crocodiles. Discrimination and non-attachment are the turmeric. Knowledge of what is real and what is unreal is known as discrimination. God alone is real and eternal. All else is unreal, transitory, lasting just a few days. One must realize this and develop love for God, attachment to God, devotion to Him. The gopis had such an attraction for Krishna. Here is a song:"

The way – love for God – attachment, or attraction like that of gopis

Listen! The flute plays in yonder wood.

There I must go, where Krishna[2] awaits me on the path.

Tell me, dear friends, will you not come along?

To you, my friends, Krishna is but a mere name, an empty name,

But to me He is an ache in my heart.

You hear His flute with only your ears, but I hear it playing in my heart:

Krishna's flute that beckons, "Come, O Radha!

Without you there is no beauty in the grove."

Singing this song with tears in his eyes, Thakur says to Keshab and the other devotees, "You may or

1. Viveka and vairagya.
2. Shyam, of dark blue complexion.

may not accept Radha and Krishna, but make their feelings of attraction and attachment your own. Who has such yearning for God? Make an effort. Only when you yearn for God, will you realize Him."

Chapter Seven

saṁniyamyendriyagrāmaṁ sarvatra samabuddha-
yaḥ ।
te prāpnuvanti mām eva sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ ।।

[Having restrained the multitude of senses, even-minded in everything, rejoicing in the welfare of all beings, they indeed come to Me.]

– Bhagavad Gita 12:4

Steamer trip with Keshab Sen – engaged in the welfare of all beings

It is ebb tide and the steamer is progressing rapidly toward Calcutta. The captain has given orders to go a little farther down the river to the Botanical Gardens on the other side of the bridge. How far the steamer has gone is not known to many, they have been listening to Sri Ramakrishna's words with such rapt attention. They have no idea of time.

They are all eating puffed rice with coconut that they have kept in the folds of their cloths. It is a festivity of joy. Keshab had arranged for the puffed rice. At this moment Thakur sees that Vijay and Keshab are not at ease in each other's company. Now he will make them compromise, as if they are two innocent boys. He is engaged in the welfare of all beings.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab*): "Look, Vijay is here. Your disputes and differences are like battles between Rama and Shiva. (*Laughter.*) Shiva is

Rama's guru. They had a fight, and then they made up. But the fighting and gibberish between Shiva's ghosts and Rama's monkeys has no end! (*Loud laughter*.)

"You are the same flesh and blood. Yet, you know, such things can't be avoided. Lava and Kusha (Rama's sons) fought a war with their father. And, you know, a mother and her daughter observe Tuesday's fast and prayers separately. It's as if the good fortune of the mother and the daughter were different. In fact, the mother's Tuesday observance brings good fortune to the daughter, just as her daughter's separate observance does for her mother. In the same way, Keshab has a samaj (religious society) of his own and Vijay thinks he must have a separate samaj. (*Laughter*.) Still, it is necessary. You may ask, 'When the Lord Himself enacts His sport why is there need for Jatila and Kutila?'[1] Without troublemakers like Jatila and Kutila, the sport doesn't develop. (*All laugh*.) And without Jatila and Kutila, there is no fun. (*Loud laughter*.)

"Ramanuja was a believer in the doctrine of Vishishtadvaita (qualified non-dualism). His guru believed in Advaitavada (non-dualism). In the end they had differences. The guru and the disciple started criticising each other's views. This happens quite often, even though people are our own flesh and blood."

1. Troublemakers who disturb the peace.

Chapter Eight

pitāsi lokasya carācarasya tvam asya pūjyaśca gurur
garīyān ।
na tvatsamo 'sty abhyadhikaḥ kuto 'nyo lokatraye
'py apratimaprabhāva ।।

[You are the Father of the moving and the unmoving universe. You are adored by this world, You are the revered Guru. In the three worlds there is none who can surpass you. You, O Being of incomparable power!]

– Bhagavad Gita 11:43

Advice to Keshab – gurudom and Brahmo Samaj – Sat-chit-ananda alone is Guru

All are rejoicing. Thakur says to Keshab: "You do not examine the nature of your disciples before accepting them. That's why they break away like this.

"Men are the same in appearance, but they differ in nature. In some, sattvaguna[1] dominates, in others rajoguna,[2] and again in others tamoguna.[3] Puli (a kind of stuffed sweet) may all have the same look. But some contain sweetened condensed milk, some the kernel of coconut sweetened by treacle or sugar, and some have kalai pulse boiled without any sweetening added. (*All laugh*.)

"Do you know what I think about it? I go on eating and drinking, and the Divine Mother knows

1. Qualities that lead Godward.
2. Qualities that incline one to multiply work and duty.
3. Qualities that cause ignorance and laziness and turn the mind away from God.

all. There are three words that prick me – guru, doer, and father.

"There is only one Guru, who is Sat-chit-ananda. It is Sat-chit-ananda alone who teaches. For my part, I feel like a child. You can find lakhs of men as gurus. Everyone wants to be a guru. Who wants to be a disciple?

"Teaching mankind is very difficult. It is only when God manifests and gives a commission that it is possible. Narada, Sukadeva, and others received that command to teach. Sankaracharya also was commissioned by God. If you are not commissioned, who will listen to you? You know the minds of Calcutta people. So long as there is fire, the milk continues to boil. As soon as the fire is withdrawn, it stops boiling. The people of Calcutta are so impatient. For need of water, they start digging a well, but give up when they find a few rocks. Then they start digging at another place. If they find sand there, they become discouraged and look once again for another place to dig. This is what they do.

"Again, it's not enough to imagine that you have received God's command. Such an idea is quite mistaken. God actually appears before you and speaks to you. Only then do you receive the command. What a weight such words carry then! They can move a mountain. Mere lecturing? People will listen for a few days and then forget. They won't act on the instruction."

Earlier story of his life – ecstatic vision of Haldarpukur

"In the countryside (at Thakur's native village) is a pond called Haldarpukur. People used to defecate on its bank every morning. Others would shout abuse, yet the same thing would happen the next day. The defecation didn't stop. People then ap-proached the Company (Municipality). They, in turn, sent out an official to put up a notice that said, 'Do not relieve yourself here.' The nuisance stopped immediately. (*Everybody laughs.*)

"To teach others, a person must have the badge of authority. Without it, the teaching is ridiculous. We do not teach ourselves, but go preach to others instead! It is like the blind leading the blind. (*Laughter.*) It brings more harm than good. Only when you have seen God can you see through other people and understand what diseases of the soul they have been stricken with. Only then can you instruct them."

Clouded by egotism one thinks that he is the doer[1]

"You must have a direct command from God. Otherwise, it will only be self-assertion to say, 'I teach mankind.' Self-assertion is the offspring of ignorance. Out of ignorance one feels, 'I am the doer.' One becomes a jivanmukta only by realizing, 'God is the sole actor in the three worlds. I am a mere instrument in His hands.' All troubles, all

1. Ahamkār vimūḍhātmā kartāham iti manyate। Bhagavad Gita 3:27.

want of peace, come from the notion, 'I am the doer, I am a free agent.'"

Chapter Nine

tasmād asaktaḥ satataṁ kāryaṁ karma samācara ।
asakto hyācarankarma param āpnoti pūruṣaḥ ।।

[Therefore, constantly perform your own duties without attachment; for by doing duties without attachment, man verily obtains the Supreme.]

– Bhagavad Gita 3:19

The steamer trip – instruction to Keshab and other Brahmo devotees on karma yoga

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab and the other devotees*): "You talk of doing good to the world. I ask you, is the world so small? Who are you to do good to the world? Attain God by performing spiritual prac-tices. Attain Him. He will give you power. Only then will you be able to do good to others; otherwise not."

A devotee: "Should we give up all work until we realize God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, why should you give up work? You will have to do all this: meditate on God, chant His names and glories, and perform your daily devotions."

A Brahmo devotee: "But what about worldly work? Worldly affairs?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, you should attend to that too, as much as is necessary to run the household. But you must cry in a lonely corner and

pray to God so that you do all these works selflessly.[1] And you should pray, 'O Lord, please lessen my worldly work, because O Lord, I see that when I am engrossed in too much work, I forget You. I think that I'm doing the work in a selfless way, but it turns out to be with a motive.[2] A desire for name and fame can crop up when I increase my giving in charity and distributing free meals.'"

The earlier story of his life – talk on activities such as charity with Sambhu Mallick

"Sambhu Mallick brought up the topic of hospitals, dispensaries, schools, roads, and reservoirs. I said to him, 'You should do only that which comes your way and which appears to be of pressing necessity – this too in the spirit of not expecting any reward. Don't seek more work. If you do, you will lose sight of God. Say you go to the Kalighat Temple and busy yourself in distributing alms – but you miss the darshan of Kali! (*Laughter*.) First of all, have the darshan of Kali, even if you have to push your way through to reach Her. Afterwards you may or may not practice charity. If you like, give as much as you can. After all, work is meant for realizing God. That's why I said to Sambhu, 'Suppose the Lord appears before you, what will you say to Him? "Please build a number of hospitals and dispensaries?"' (*Laughter*.) A devotee never asks for such things. Instead he says, 'Lord, grant me a place at Your lotus feet, always keep me with You, grant me pure love and devotion to Your lotus feet.'

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1. Nishkama.
2. Sakama.

"Karma yoga is very hard indeed. The rituals laid down in the sacred books are very hard to practice in the Kaliyuga. Life is dependent on food. Too much work is not possible. It will all be over for the patient suffering from fever if he's given a slow-acting treatment as prescribed by an old-fashioned Hindu physician[1] – he cannot last long. These days he needs the fast-acting fever mixture of D. Gupta.[2] In the Kaliyuga one should practice Bhakti Yoga, chanting the Lord's name and His glories, and prayer. Indeed, Bhakti Yoga is the law of this age. (*To the Brahmo devotees*) You Brahmos also practice Bhakti Yoga. You repeat the name of God and chant the glories of the Divine Mother. You are indeed blessed! Your path is really fine. You are not Vedantists. You don't say, 'The world is like a dream.' You are not such brahmajnanis; you are devotees. You believe that God is a person. This is very fine. You are devotees. You will certainly attain God when you call upon Him with a yearning heart."

Chapter Ten

Surendra's house – with Narendra and others

The steamer has now returned to the Kayalaghat (Calcutta). All prepare to land. Coming out of the cabin, they see that the full moon of Kojagar (the month of Aswin) is shining brightly. The bosom of the Ganges[3] sparkles in the moonlight. A carriage is called for Sri Ramakrishna. In a little while he enters it with

1. Kaviraj.
2. A patent medicine.
3. Bhagirathi.

M. and some other devotees. Nandalal, Keshab's nephew, also gets in. He will accompany Thakur for some distance.

When they all are seated in the carriage, Thakur asks, "Where is he?" meaning Keshab. Soon Keshab appears alone, smiling. He asks who is accompanying Thakur. After everyone is seated in the carriage, Keshab prostrates on the ground and takes the dust of Thakur's feet. Thakur bids him an affectionate goodbye. The carriage rolls along the beautiful main thoroughfare of the English neighbourhood. Lighted mansions adorning both sides of the road seem as if they are in repose in the mellow, serene rays of the full moon. Near the main gates are gaslights. In almost every home English ladies are singing to the accompaniment of the harmonium or piano. Thakur smiles joyfully as he passes. Suddenly he says, "I'm feeling thirsty. What can be done?" What to do! Nandalal stops the carriage near the India Club, goes upstairs to get water, and brings back a full glass tumbler. Thakur asks sweetly, "Has the tumbler been well washed?" Nandalal says, "Yes, it has." Thakur drinks the water from the tumbler.

Thakur has the nature of a child. When the carriage starts again, he puts his head out of the window to look at the people and the horses and carriages in the moonlight. He is happy to see them all.

Nandalal gets down at Calootola. Thakur's carriage stops in Shimuliya Street at Suresh Mitra's house. Thakur calls him Surendra. He is a great devotee of Thakur's.

But Surendra is not at home. He has gone to his new garden house. The members of the household open a room on the ground floor for the guests. The carriage fare needs to be paid. Who will pay it? Had Surendra been there, he would have paid it. Thakur says to a devotee, "Ask the ladies of the house for the fare. Don't they know that their men are frequent visitors?"

Narendra lives nearby. Thakur sends for him. Meanwhile, Thakur is led to a room on the second story. The floor of the room is covered by a sheet, and a few bolsters are lying on it. On the wall is an oil painting in which Thakur is showing Keshab the harmony of all religions, including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism, as well as Vaishnava, Shakta, and Shaiva sects. Surendra had had it painted.

Sitting there, Thakur talks happily. As Narendra enters, it is as if Thakur's joy is doubled. He says, "I went on a steamer trip with Keshab Sen. Vijay was there and also all these people." Pointing to M. he adds, "You may ask him how I told Vijay and Keshab about 'Tuesday' for the mother and the daughter and that God's sport is not nourished without Jatila and Kutila – all these things. (*To M.*) Was this not so?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

It is getting dark, but Surendra has not yet come back. Thakur must return to Dakshineswar and cannot wait any longer. It is 10.30 at night. The road is bathed in moonlight.

A carriage arrives and Thakur gets in. Narendra and M. salute him and return to their homes in Calcutta.

Section III

Visit to the Sinthi Brahmo Samaj Joyful Conversation with Shivanath and Other Brahmo Devotees

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna at a religious festival

The Paramahamsa Deva has come to visit the Brahmo Samaj at Sinthi. It is Saturday, 28 October 1882, the second day of the dark fortnight in the month of Aswin.

It is the semiannual celebration of the Brahmo Samaj, and grand festivities are going on today. Sri Ramakrishna has been invited, together with a number of other devotees. At three or four in the afternoon they arrive at the beautiful garden house of Sri Veni Madhava. They have come by carriage from the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. It is in this garden house that the Brahmo Samaj conducts meetings. Sri Ramakrishna has great love for the Brahmo Samaj, and its devotees love and revere him in return. Only yesterday, Friday evening, he enjoyed a steamer trip on the Ganges, from the Kali Temple to Calcutta, with Keshab Chandra Sen and his disciples.

Sinthi is near Paikpara, about three miles north of Calcutta. Located far from the din of the city, the beautiful garden house is particularly suitable for the worship of God. The owner of the garden house organizes two festivals a year – one in the autumn and the other in the spring – and invites many devotees from Calcutta and the nearby village of Sinthi.

Shivanath and other devotees from Calcutta have come. Most of them attended the morning service and are now waiting for the evening service. They are particularly interested because they have heard that a great saint will be there in the afternoon. They want to see his happy figure and imbibe the nectar of his words, and they want to hear his sweet devotional songs and watch him dance full of love for God. Such a dance is rare even among the gods.

By afternoon a large crowd has gathered in the garden. Some are sitting on wooden benches under the shadow of vines. Others are walking with their friends along the bank of a beautiful artificial lake. Many have already taken their seats in the Samaj house, awaiting Sri Ramakrishna's arrival. There is a betel leaf shop at the entrance to the garden. Entering the garden, one feels that it is a place of worship. In the evening there will be a musical play. In all four directions the blue autumn sky reflects joy. Since early morning, a current of delight has passed through the trees, vines, and shrubs of the garden – as though they, together with the sky and all creatures, are singing one melody. Even the breeze seems divinely propitious, carrying such joy into the hearts of the devotees.

Everyone is thirsty for the appearance of the Paramahamsa Deva when his carriage arrives in front of the house. They all rise to welcome the great saint and form a circle around him.

A platform has been built in the middle of the main hall of the Samaj building. The place is filled with people. In front is the vestibule where the Paramahamsa Deva and others are seated. People also occupy the two rooms on both sides of the vestibule. Others are standing at the doorways, craning their necks to see. Even the steps leading up to the vestibule are crowded with devotees. Two or three trees near the steps support a canopy of vines and a number of benches offer seating for a few

devotees, who also strain their necks to see the great saint and try intently to hear him. Nearby a path stretches between many rows of flower beds and fruit trees. The trees gently wave in the whispering breeze, as if bowing in joy to offer Sri Ramakrishna a hearty welcome.

When the smiling Paramahamsa Deva, Sri Ramakrishna, takes his seat, the sight of all those within spontaneously falls upon this happy and most joyful figure. Until the start of the play, the rest of the devotees walk around, some alone and others with friends. Some chew betel leaf or tobacco or smoke cigarettes. Some laugh, others engage in worldly discussions on one thing or another, but as soon as the curtain rises, all talk ends and the full attention of the audience is directed to the play. Like so many bees when the lotus blooms, their attention is drawn from the other flowers of the garden, and they swarm to the nectar of the lotus.

Chapter Two

māṁ ca yo 'vyabhicāreṇa bhaktiyogena sevate ।
sa guṇān samatītyaitān brahmabhūyāya kalpate ।।

[He who serves Me with unswerving devotion goes beyond the three gunas and is fit to merge in Brahman.]

– Bhagavad Gita 14:26

Conversation with devotees

Smiling, Sri Ramakrishna looks at Shivanath and the other devotees and says, "Look! Here is Shivanath! You see, you are a devotee, so I feel very happy to see you. This is the nature of a man who is addicted to smoking hemp. He feels happy when he meets another hemp smoker. He may even embrace him." (*Shivanath and the others laugh*.)

Nature of a worldly man – the great importance of name

"When I see a person whose mind is not on God, I tell him, 'Please go sit over there.' Or I say, 'Go see the beautiful buildings! Go see them.' (*All laugh.*)

"And I see that some people who come with the devotees are not of a serious nature. They are worldly-minded; they don't like spiritual talk. Devotees like to talk about God for a long time, but these men can't sit long. They become restless and whisper into their friend's ear, 'When are you leaving?' The devotee sometimes says, 'Wait a while. We'll be leaving shortly.' But they are impatient and say, 'All right, carry on. We'll wait in the boat.' (*All laugh.*)

"If you ask worldly people to renounce everything and devote themselves to God, they don't listen to you. That's why, to attract worldly people, Gaur[1] and Nitai,[2] the two brothers, thought up a stratagem that involved soup of magur fish, the embrace of a young woman, and repeating the name of God. In the beginning, many people came to chant the name of God, tempted by the first two. Then, having tasted a bit of the nectar of the Lord's name, they realized that the fish soup was nothing compared to the tears that fall for the love of God. And that 'a young woman' meant the earth – the 'embrace of a young woman' meant to roll around in the dust for love of God.

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1. Chaitanya.
2. Familiar name of Nityananda, disciple and companion of Chaitanya.

"Nitai, in one way or another, found a way to make people repeat the name of God. Chaitanya Deva said that there is great importance in the name of the Lord. It may not show immediate results, but sooner or later it does yield fruit. For example, suppose there is a seed on the cornice of a house. After a long time, the house falls down. The seed will then fall to the ground, develop into a tree and, in time, bear fruit."

Man's nature and the three gunas – sattva, rajas, and tamas of devotion

"Just as there are the three gunas of sattva, rajas, and tamas in worldly people, in the same way there are the three qualities of sattva, rajas, and tamas of devotion, too.

"You know what kind of sattva a worldly man has? His house is somewhat in shambles, but he doesn't get it repaired. There are pigeon droppings in the vestibule of the shrine, and moss grows in the courtyard, but he is unaware of it. Household furniture may have grown old, but he doesn't polish or replace it. He dresses in simple clothes. Such a man is very calm, polite, compassionate, and peaceful. He does no harm to anyone.

"There are also signs of rajas in a worldly man. A watch with a chain, and two or three rings on his fingers. The furnishings of his house are in tip-top shape. On the walls hang a picture of the queen and a picture of the prince – or of some great personage. His house is well plastered and so forth; there is no stain anywhere. He has a large closet of fine clothes, and uniforms for his servants.

"The tamas of a worldly man also has its signs: sleep, lust, anger, pride, and so on.

"Devotion also has its sattva. The devotee who possesses the quality of sattva meditates secretly. Perhaps he meditates inside his mosquito net. Everybody thinks he is either sleeping or that he did not sleep well during the night and is late getting up. His attachment to his body is only to the extent of filling his stomach – a simple dish of rice with spinach suffices for him. There is no fuss and bother about his meals, nor in his dress or household furnishings. And a sattvic devotee never flatters anybody for money.

"When a person has devotion of the rajasic type, he may wear a holy mark on his forehead and a rosary of rudraksha[1] interspersed with gold beads. (*Everybody laughs*.) When he worships, he dresses himself in a silk cloth."

Chapter Three

klaibyaṁ mā sma gamaḥ pārtha naitat tvayyupa-
padyate।
kṣudraṁ hṛdayadaurbalyaṁ tyaktvottiṣṭha paraṁ-
tapa।।

[O Partha (Arjuna), do not yield to cowardice. It does not befit you. Give up your despicable faint-heartedness and arise, O vanquisher of foes!]

– Bhagavad Gita 2:3

1. The kernel of a berry used for beads in rosaries.

The great importance of name, and sin – three kinds of teachers

Sri Ramakrishna: "A man with the devotion of tamas has burning faith. Such a devotee forces the Lord like a dacoit forces a man to part with his wealth. 'Tie him up! Beat him! Kill him!' Such is the disposition of a dacoit."

Sri Ramakrishna looks upward and sings in a voice infused with love:

> Why go to Gaya, Ganga, Prabhas, Kashi, or Kanchi, if I can breathe my last chanting Kali's name?
>
> Of what use are rituals[1] for one who utters Kali's name at dawn and noon and dusk? Worship itself will follow in his footsteps, never catching up.
>
> Charity, vows, and almsgiving no longer appeal to Madan's mind. His worship alone is surrender at the Mother's blessed feet.
>
> Lord Shiva Himself, the God of Gods, with all His powers, sings Her praises. Who, then, can conceive of the power of Her holy name?

Thakur sings, intoxicated in ecstasy as if he is initiated in agnimantra:[2]

> Mother, can I but die with Durga's name upon my lips,
>
> I shall see, O Shankari, how in the end you cannot refuse to rescue me.

"Why, I have chanted Her name! How can there be any sin in me? I am Her son! I am the inheritor of Her power and glory! Such must be the spirit.

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1. Sandhyas performed at dawn, noon, and twilight.
2. A mantra that makes one determined to achieve an extremely difficult and daunting task.

"If you can give a turn to your tamoguna, you can use it to realize God. Force your demands on Him! He's no stranger. Indeed, He is our own. And then see how the quality of tamas can be used for the welfare of others.

"There are three types of physicians – superior, mediocre, and inferior. The physician who comes, feels the patient's pulse, and then says to him, 'Brother, please take this medicine,' and leaves – he is an inferior physician. He doesn't bother to find out if the patient has taken the medicine. The physician who persuades the patient in many ways to take the medicine, who says in a sweet voice, 'Oh brother, how can you be cured unless you take the medicine? Dear brother, please take it. See, I myself am mixing it for you. Now take it,' – he is a mediocre physician. And the physician who sees that a patient stubbornly refuses to take the medicine, puts his knee on the patient's chest, and forces the medicine down his throat – he is a superior physician. This is the tamoguna of the physician. It helps the patient; it does not harm him.

"Like physicians, religious teachers[1] are also of three types. Those who instruct their disciples on spiritual matters and then make no inquiries about their progress are of the inferior type. Those who repeat their teachings again and again for the good of their disciples so that they may internalize the instructions, who make requests in various ways, and show love – these are the mediocre type of

1. Acharyas.

teacher. And those who use force when they find that the disciples do not listen, I call superior."

Chapter Four

yato vāco nivartante । aprāpya manasā saha ।

[Where mind and speech cannot reach.]

– Taittiriya Upanishad 2:4

What Brahman is cannot be expressed by speech

A Brahmo devotee asked, "Is God with form or formless?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "One cannot limit God. He is formless and then with form, too. For a devotee, He is with form. For a jnani, that is to say, one who considers the world a dream, God is formless. The devotee thinks that God is one and the world is another. That is why the Lord manifests to him as a person. Jnanis such as Vedantists reason, 'Not this, not this.' By so reasoning, the jnani has the inner feeling and experience[1] that his individuality is an illusion, so the world also is like a dream. The jnani feels the consciousness of Brahman within. But what God is, he cannot express in words.

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1. Bodhebodha: An intellectual, literal, imaginative, inner feeling of the real nature of Brahman (Atman). The Vedanta illustrates it in this way (taken from Vol. III of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, 24 August, 1882): A person is lying in a room in the dark. Somebody gropes in the dark to reach him. His hand touches a couch and he says, "No, this is not he." Then he touches the window. "This too is not he." Then he touches the door and again says to himself, "No, not he. Not this, not this, not this." At last his hand touches the person. Then he says, "That's it. That is the person." This means that he has reached the person, but he hasn't known him intimately.

"Do you know what it's like? It's like a shoreless ocean of Sat-chit-ananda.[1] Water in the ocean turns into ice at places with the cooling influence of love. This ice takes a form. In other words, at times God manifests and takes a physical form for the devotee. When the sun of knowledge rises, the ice melts. Then God does not appear as a person. Also His form is not visible. What God is cannot be expressed in words. Who is there to express Him? He who would describe Him has disappeared. You cannot find his 'I,' even if you search for it.

"When one continues to reason, one's 'I-ness' vanishes completely. First you peel off the outer red skin of an onion, then the soft white one. One continues to peel in this way until nothing of the onion remains.

"When 'I-ness' vanishes, who remains to look for it? Who is there to tell what the inner feeling and experience[2] of the real nature of Brahman is?

"A salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. As soon as it went into the water, it melted and became one with it. Then who was there to tell about it?

"A sign of the highest spiritual knowledge[3] is that a person becomes silent. The salt doll of 'I-ness' gets dissolved in the sea of Sat-chit-ananda – not a trace of differentiation remains.

"As long as reasoning is not complete, man continues to indulge in endless discussions. But no

1. Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.
2. Bodhebodha.
3. Purna jnana.

sooner does one stop reasoning than one becomes silent. The gurgling sound of water stops when the pitcher is filled with water – that is to say, when the water in the pitcher becomes one with the water of the pond the pitcher is dipped in. There is a gurgling sound only so long as the pitcher is not filled with water.

"In the olden days people used to say that a ship does not return if it reaches 'black waters.'"

But 'I-ness' does not vanish

"When the ego vanishes, all troubles cease. You may reason a thousand times, but the ego does not disappear. For you and me, it is good to cherish the 'I' of a devotee of God.

"For a devotee, Brahman is with qualities.[1] In other words, God is visible as a person with a form. And it is He who listens to prayers. All your prayers are addressed to Him alone. You are not Vedantists, nor are you jnanis; you are devotees. Whether you accept God with form or not does not matter. It is enough to feel that God is a person who listens to your prayers, who creates, preserves, and dissolves – a person who is infinitely powerful.

"It is easier to reach God by the path of love and devotion."

1. Saguna.

Chapter Five

bhaktyā tv ananyayā śakya aham evaṁvidho ʻrjuna।
jñātuṁ draṣṭuṁ ca tattvena praveṣṭuṁ ca paraṁ-
tapa।।

[But by unswerving devotion that form of Mine can be known and seen in reality and also entered, O scorcher of foes.]

– Bhagavad Gita 11:54

Vision of God – with form or without form

A Brahmo devotee asked, "Sir, can we see God? If so, why don't we see Him?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, surely He can be seen. He is seen with form and He is seen without form, too. How can I explain this to you?"

The Brahmo devotee: "By what method can one see Him?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Can you weep for Him with great longing?

"People shed pitchers full of tears for son, wife, and money. But who weeps for God? As long as a baby remains distracted with his pap, his mother attends to cooking and all her household chores. But when the child tires of the pap and throws it away, screaming for its mother, she takes the rice pan off the fire, comes running, and picks the baby up in her arms."

The Brahmo devotee: "Sir, why are there so many ideas about God's form? Some say that God is with form, some say that He is formless. And even

among believers in God with form, we hear of so many different forms. Why such confusion?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Whichever form of God a devotee sees, he believes in that alone. In reality, there is no confusion. If God is attained by any means, He will Himself explain everything. If you have never been to a particular neighbourhood, how can you know everything about it?

"Listen to a story. A man went out to relieve himself. He saw a creature in a tree. On his return he said to another man, 'I saw a beautiful red animal on that tree.' The other man replied, 'When I went there, I also saw it. But it's not red, it's green.' Yet another man said, 'No, no, I also saw it. It's yellow.' In the same way others said, 'No, it is the colour of tobacco, or eggplant, or blue, and so on.' All this led to a quarrel. Then they went to the foot of the tree and saw a man sitting there. When asked about it, he said, 'I live under this tree. I know it very well. Whatever you say is true. It is sometimes red, sometimes green, sometimes yellow, sometimes blue, and also of many more hues. It has many colours, and sometimes it has no colour at all. Now it has qualities, now it has none.'

"This means that only the man who is always thinking of God can know His real nature. That person alone knows that God is seen in different forms and in different aspects. He is with qualities, and He is also without qualities. Only he who lives under the tree knows that the variegated chameleon has different colours, and that sometimes it has no colour at all. Other people just argue, quarrel, and trouble themselves.

"Kabir used to say, 'The One without form is my Father and with form, my Mother.'

"God reveals Himself in the form the devotee loves most – gracious loving Lord of the devotee[1] that He is. The Purana says that God assumed the form of Rama for the sake of his heroic devotee, Hanuman."

Explanation of the forms of Kali and Shyama – the Infinite is incomprehensible

"In Vedanta philosophy there are no forms. Its ultimate principle is that Brahman is the only Reality, and the phenomenal universe made of names and forms is illusory. As long as one cherishes the idea, 'I am a devotee,' it is possible to have a vision of the form of God and to see Him as a person. From the standpoint of reasoning, the feeling 'I am a devotee' keeps him somewhat away from God.

"Why are the forms of Kali and Shyama three and a half cubits high? Because of distance. On account of distance, the sun seems small. If you go near, it will look big beyond your imagination. So why are Kali and Shyama black? Because of distance. Again, water in a lake appears green, blue, or black from a distance, but if you go near and take some water in your palm, you will find that it has no colour. The sky from a distance appears blue, but if you go near it, it has no colour.

"So I say that according to the Vedanta philosophy, Brahman is without attributes. What its real nature is cannot be expressed in words. But

1. Bhakta vatsala.

as long as you as a person are real, the world is also real. Then the names and forms of God are also real. And feeling Him to be a person is real, too.

"Yours is the path of love and devotion for God. It is a very good and easy path. Can the Infinite be known? Besides, what is the need to know It? Having the rare privilege of being born as human beings, we should develop devotion to His lotus feet by any means possible.

"If I can quench my thirst with one glass of water, what need is there for me to measure the quantity of water in the lake? I get intoxicated with half a bottle of wine. What is the need to know the quantity of wine in the wine shop? In the same way, what is the need to know the Infinite?"

Chapter Six

yastvātmaratireva syād ātmatṛptaś ca mānavaḥ ।
ātmanyeva ca saṁtuṣṭas tasya kāryaṁ na vidyate।।

[For the one who rejoices in the Self, is satisfied with the Self, and is centred in the Self, for that person there remains no duty to act.]

– Bhagavad Gita 3:17

Signs of God-realization – seven planes and the knowledge of Brahman

Sri Ramakrishna: "The Vedas describe the different states of a knower of Brahman. However, this path, the path of knowledge, is a very difficult path. If the least trace of worldliness – attachment to 'lust and greed' – persists, one cannot attain knowledge. This path is not for the Kaliyuga.

"Regarding this, the Vedas talk of the seven planes, or states of mind. When the mind is attached to the world, it dwells in the sex organ or the organ of evacuation or the navel. It does not look upward in this state. Its only concern is 'lust and greed.' The fourth plane of the mind is the heart. It is here that the mind gains initial spiritual awareness. One sees light all around. Seeing the divine light, one is amazed and exclaims, 'What is this? What is this!' The mind then does not go downward [toward the world].

"The fifth plane of the mind is at the throat. When the mind of a person rises to the throat, he is freed from all ignorance and illusion. He does not like to talk or hear about anything but God. If someone talks of other things, he leaves the place. The sixth plane of the mind is at the forehead. When the mind reaches there, one sees a divine form all twenty-four hours of the day. However, a bit of 'I-ness' exists even then. Such a person feels intoxicated at the vision of that supreme and unique form. He tries to touch and embrace the form, but cannot. It is like the light in a lantern. One feels that one can touch the light, but because of the glass in between, one cannot touch it. At the top of the head is the seventh plane. When the mind rises to it, one goes into samadhi and the follower of the path of knowledge has the direct vision of Brahman. But in this state, the body does not last for many days. The person remains unconscious and can eat nothing. If milk is poured into the mouth, it runs out. On this plane of consciousness, death comes in twenty-one days.

This is the state of the Brahmajnani.[1] Yours is the path of love and devotion to God. It is a very good and easy path."

Actions drop off after samadhi – an earlier story of his life – how Thakur gave up karmas such as offering drinking water to the deities

"Once a person asked me, 'Sir, can you teach me samadhi?' (*Everybody laughs*.)

"All actions drop off after samadhi. Actions like worship, japa, and all worldly activities drop off. In the beginning one is very active, but as a man advances towards God, the outer display of actions becomes less – so much so that even singing His names and glories ceases. (*To Shivanath*) Before you arrived at the meeting, people talked a great deal about your good name, qualities, and so on. But as soon as you arrived, all that stopped. Now everybody takes joy at the sight of you and says, 'Here is Shivanath Babu!' All other talk about you stops.

"After this state of mine I noticed that at the time of offering Ganges water to the deities, it trickled through my fingers. I began to cry and asked Haladhari, 'Brother, what has happened?' Haladhari told me that it is called the fingers of the hand remaining apart.[2] After the vision of God, actions such as offering water to the deities[3] drop off.

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1. Knower of Brahman.
2. Galitahasta.
3. Tarpana.

"In the group singing of hymns, one first sings, 'Nitai is my mad elephant.' As this mood deepens, one simply utters, 'Elephant, elephant.' Next it is only, 'Elephant.' And lastly, while saying, 'Ele,' one goes into bhava samadhi. Then the person who was singing says not a word.

"It is the same as at a feast given to brahmins. In the beginning there is so much activity. When they sit down with leaf plates in front of them, much of the noise ceases. One hears only, 'Bring some luchis, bring some here.' And again, when they begin eating the luchis and vegetables, seventy-five percent of the noise subsides. When they have curds, you can hear only one sound, 'sup, sup' (from smacking their lips). (*All laugh*.) One can say that nobody utters a word. The feast over, the next step is to go to sleep. Then there is absolute silence.

"Therefore, I say that in the beginning there is a lot of activity, but the more you advance on the path towards God, the less your activities will be. At the end, all work drops away and samadhi follows.

"When a housewife is pregnant, her mother-in-law reduces her duties. In the last month, she is almost free from work. When the child is born, there is complete renunciation of work. The mother only has to look after the baby. All chores in the household are attended to by the mother-in-law, the husband's sister, or his elder sister-in-law."

Avatars and the like live after samadhi for instruction of mankind

"After samadhi, a person usually dies. But some, like Narada, and avatars like Chaitanya Deva, live to instruct mankind. After digging a well, most people throw away the spade and basket. But there are some who keep them, thinking that they may, perhaps, be needed by their neighbours. In the same way, highly spiritual personalities feel greatly concerned for the suffering of others. They are not so selfish as to be satisfied with their own illumination. You know well how selfish people behave. If you ask them to urinate here, they won't, lest it should later do you good. (*All laugh*.) If you ask them to bring sandesh for a pice from a shop, they'll lick it on their way back. (*All laugh*.)

"There is a special manifestation of divine power in some. An ordinary man is afraid to give instruction to others. Old and worn out wood[1] may float on water, but it sinks the moment a bird sits on it. Sages like Narada are like huge logs[2] that will not only float on water, but also carry men, bullocks, and even elephants."

1. Habate wood.
2. Bahaduri wood.

Chapter Seven

adṛṣṭapūrvaṁ hṛṣito ‘smi dṛṣṭvā bhayena ca pravyathitaṁ mano me ।
tad eva me darśaya deva rūpaṁ prasīda deveśa jagannivāsa ।।

[I rejoice that I have seen what was never seen before, but my mind is shaken with fear. Show me that form I once saw, O God; have mercy, O God of gods and Abode of the Universe.]

– Bhagavad Gita 11:45

Prayer system of the Brahmo Samaj and talk on God's powers and glory

An earlier story of his life – theft of an ornament from the Radhakanta Temple at Dakshineswar

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shivanath*): "Yes, my dear sir, why do you dwell so much on the glories and powers of God? I said the same to Keshab Sen. One day they all came to the Kali Temple. I said, 'I would like to hear how you lecture.' A meeting was then arranged in the chandni (portal) on the Ganges ghat and Keshab began to lecture. He spoke so well, I went into samadhi. Later I said to him, 'Why do you talk so much about all this: "Oh Lord, what beautiful flowers You have made! You have created the sky, the stars, the sea, and so on!" Those who love splendour, love to talk about God's splendour.' When Radhakanta's ornament was stolen, Mathur Babu[1] went to the Radhakanta Temple and said to the deity, 'Fie on you, Lord! You couldn't guard your own ornaments!' I said to

1. Son-in-law of Rani Rasmani.

Mathur Babu, 'What [low] intelligence you have! He who has Lakshmi herself for his handmaid, he whose feet she massages, how can he lack splendour? Jewelry is very precious to you, but for the Lord it is just a few clods of earth. Fie on you! You should not talk so stupidly. What riches can you give to God?' That is why I say that a man seeks a person in whom he finds joy. What use is it to find out from him where he lives, how many buildings and gardens he owns, how much wealth, how many relatives, how many male and female servants he has? When I see Narendra, I forget everything. I've never asked him, even by mistake, where he lives, what his father does, how many brothers he has, and so on. Dive deep into the sweetness of God's love. What need is there for us to find out about God's infinite creation, His limitless splendours?"

Sri Ramakrishna again sings a song full of sweetness with a voice that surpasses the voices of the celestial musicians[1] who sing there the glories of the Most High:

> Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty, and to the deepest depths descend: there you will find the gem of Love.[2]
>
> Go seek, go seek, O mind, the blessed Vrindavan within your heart, the abode of the Lord of Love. Then in your heart the unceasing light of knowledge will ever shine.
>
> Who is it that steers your boat over solid ground? It is your guru, says Kabir. Listen, and meditate on his holy feet.

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1. Gandharvas.
2. Prema.

"Even so, after the vision of God, the devotee wants to witness His lila. After slaying Ravana, Ramachandra entered Lanka. Nikasha, Ravana's old mother, tried to run away. Lakshmana said, 'Brother Rama, how strange this is! This Nikasha is such an old woman, she's suffered so much at the loss of her sons, yet she's terrified of losing her own life and is taking to her heels.' Ramachandra, giving assurance of safety to Nikasha, called her to him and asked her about it. She replied, 'Rama, I have been able to watch all this lila of yours because I'm alive. I want to live longer so that I may see more of it.' (*All laugh*.)

(*To Shivanath*) "I like to see you. What shall I live for if I don't see pure-souled ones? The reason? I feel that pure-souled ones are my friends from a previous incarnation."

A Brahmo devotee asks, "Sir, do you believe in rebirth?"

Rebirth – O Arjuna, you and I have passed through many births[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, they say there is rebirth. How can we of tiny intellect understand the actions of God? Many people have said it is so, so I don't disbelieve. Bhishma Deva lay dying on his bed of arrows. All the Pandavas were standing by with Sri Krishna. They saw tears flowing from Bhishma Deva's eyes. Arjuna said to Sri Krishna, 'Brother, how strange it is! Pitamah, who is Bhishma Deva himself, who has truly conquered

1. bahūni me vyatītāni janmāni tava cārjuna। Bhagavad Gita 4:5.

his senses – a jnani and one of the eight Vasus[1] – even he weeps at the time of his death because of maya. When Sri Krishna asked Bhishma about it, Bhishma replied, 'Sri Krishna, you know very well that I'm not weeping because of that. When I see that there is no end to suffering, even of the Pandavas who have the Lord Himself as their charioteer, I weep, thinking that I have not been able to understand anything of the ways of God.'"

In the joy of devotional singing with the devotees

Now the evening worship begins in the Samaj building. It is about half past eight. After four or five dandas,[2] the moon lights up the night. The trees and leaves of the creepers in the garden seem to float in the clear autumnal moonbeams. In the meantime devotional singing[3] has begun in the prayer hall. Sri Ramakrishna is dancing, intoxicated with love for God. Brahmo devotees holding drums and cymbals dance around him. Everyone is intoxicated, in bhava, as if having the vision of God. The sound of God's name rises to a crescendo. Villagers all around listen, their minds full of gratitude to Veni Madhava, the devotee owner of the garden.

At the end of the kirtan, Sri Ramakrishna prostrates on the ground to salute the Mother of the Universe. While doing so, he says, "Bhagavata, Bhakta, Bhagavan! Salutations at the feet of jnanis, salutations at the feet of devotees, salutations at the feet of the devotees of God with form, salutations at the feet of the devotees of God

1. A group of eight devas (gods).
2. According to Vedic astrological calculations, the twenty-four hours of a day and night are divided into sixty dandas.
3. Kirtan.

without form, salutations at the feet of the knowers of Brahman of old, salutations at the feet of the knowers of Brahman of today's Brahmo Samaj."

Veni Madhava has provided various kinds of delicious dishes for the enjoyment of the assembled devotees. Full of joy in their company, Sri Ramakrishna also partakes of the prasad.[1]

1. Sacramental food offered to the deity.

Section IV

Sri Ramakrishna Instructs Vijaykrishna Goswami and Other Brahmo Devotees

Chapter One

na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā
vā na bhūyaḥ ।
ajo nityaḥ śāśvato ʻyaṁ purāṇo na hanyate
hanyamāne śarīre ।।

[The Atman is neither born nor does it die. Coming into being and ceasing to be do not take place in it. Unborn, eternal, constant, and ancient, it is not killed when the body is slain.]

– Bhagavad Gita 2:20

Is it suicide if a liberated person ends his life?

It is the month of Agrahayana, the fourth day of the bright fortnight, Thursday, 14 December 1882. Vijaykrishna Goswami has come to see Sri Ramakrishna at the Kali Temple garden at Dakshineswar. He is accompanied by three or four Brahmo devotees. They have come from Calcutta by boat with Balaram, a great devotee of the Paramahamsa Deva.

At midday, Sri Ramakrishna is resting. On Sundays people come in large numbers to see him, but devotees who want to have a personal talk with him usually visit on other days.

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on his wooden cot. Vijay, Balaram, M., and some of the other devotees sit on a

mat facing west, others on the bare floor, in front of Thakur. The Ganges is seen from the western door of the room. Its winter waters are calm and clear. Just beyond the door is the western semicircular verandah. Beyond it are flower gardens and then the embankment. Along the western side of the embankment flows the holy Ganges, the purifier of sins, as if joyfully washing the feet of the temple of the Lord.

It is winter, so all are dressed in warm clothes. Vijay is suffering from colic and has brought medicine in a small glass bottle. He is to take the medicine at prescribed times.

Vijay is a salaried preacher in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and delivers sermons from the pulpit. He now finds himself involved in different controversies with the Samaj, but is not allowed the freedom to act on or to express his independent views. He feels helpless because he has accepted the assignment. Vijay comes from the very pious family of Advaita Goswami, a jnani who meditated upon the formless Brahman; at the same time he displayed the highest intensity of divine love. He was a foremost and intimate disciple of Lord Chaitanya Deva. Mad with love for God, he used to dance with such fervor that he would lose outer consciousness, often dropping the cloth that he was wearing. Vijay, having joined the Brahmo Samaj, meditates on the formless Parabrahman, but the blood of the great devotee, Advaita Goswami, flows through his veins. The seed of God's love lies ready to sprout within him; it is only a matter of time. That is why he has been charmed to see the state of Sri Ramakrishna's divine fervour, stemming from love for God, a state rare even among the gods. Just as a snake charmed by music continues to sit beside the snake charmer, Vijay, charmed by the divine words emanating from the holy lips of Sri Ramakrishna, stays by his side. And when he dances like a child with love for God, Vijay dances with him.

A boy named Vishnu who lived in Ariadaha has recently committed suicide by cutting his throat with a razor. Today this topic comes up first.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay, M., and the other devotees*): "Look, this boy has ended his life. When I heard about it, I felt very bad. He used to come here. He was a schoolboy, but he'd often say that he had no liking for the world. He had lived for a few days with some relatives in the west (west of Bengal, i.e. Uttar Pradesh or Punjab). He used to meditate in a solitary field or forest or in the hills. He used to tell me that he had strange visions of various forms of God.

"I believe it was his last birth. In his previous birth he must have accomplished a lot. Perhaps only a little was left undone and he finished that in this life.

"One must admit the tendencies of one's past birth.[1] There is a story about a man practicing spiritual discipline on a corpse[2] in a deep forest. He was worshiping the Divine Mother[3] and he began to have frightful visions. Finally a tiger carried him away. There was another man who had climbed up a nearby tree in fear of the tiger. Seeing the dead body and arrangements for worship, he came down, took some holy water, and sat on the corpse. He had performed only a little japa when the Divine Mother appeared before him and said, 'I am pleased with you. Ask for a boon.' Bowing low at the lotus feet of the Mother, he said, 'Mother, may I just ask

1. Samskaras.
2. Shava sadhana.
3. Bhagavati.

You one thing? I am amazed at Your action. After that other man made so many arrangements for worship and practiced spiritual disciplines laboriously for so many days, You did not bless him. But I who know nothing and hear nothing – I never repeat Your name or practice any spiritual discipline, I have neither spiritual knowledge nor love and devotion for You – yet I receive Your grace!' The Divine Mother laughed and said, 'Child, you don't remember your past lives. You practiced austerities for me for so many births! It is because of the strength of those austerities that all these things were arranged for you. It is also for that reason that you are blessed with my vision. Now tell me, what boon do you want?'"

A devotee: "I feel frightened to hear of the suicide."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Suicide is a great sin. A person who commits suicide will have to return and again suffer the world's trials and tribulations.

"But if a person ends his life after having the vision of God, it is not suicide. There is no harm in giving up the body that way. Some people end their lives after attaining Knowledge. After a gold image has been cast in a clay mould, the mould may be preserved, or, if it is cracked, it can be thrown away.

"Many years ago a boy named Gopal Sen used to come here from Baranagore. He was about twenty years old. He would experience such deep emotions that Hriday had to hold him. He later did fall and break some bones. One day the boy suddenly touched my feet and said, 'Sir, I won't be able to

come here any more, so I take your leave.' A few days later I heard that he had given up his body."

Chapter Two

anityam asukhaṁ lokam imaṁ prāpya bhajasva
mām ||

[Having come to this impermanent and unhappy world, worship Me.]

– Bhagavad Gita 9:33

Four classes of men – attachment to "lust and greed" is a sign of the worldly

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are four classes of human beings – bound souls, seekers after liberation, the liberated, and the ever-free. The world is like a fishing net. Individual souls are the fish, and God, whose maya is the world, is the fisherman. When fish fall into the net, many of them try to tear it to free themselves. They are like those seeking liberation. However, not all who try to escape are able to do so. Only a few fish slip out with a splash. Then people cry out, 'There goes a big one!' Those few are the liberated ones. Some fish are so cautious by nature that they never fall into the net. Narada and other such saints are ever-free; they never fall into the net of the world. But most fish are unaware that they have fallen into the net and will die there. They dart straight ahead, taking the net along with them, and try to hide in the mud. They make no attempt to escape; rather, they dig deeper into the mud. They are like bound souls. They live in the net and think, 'We are

quite happy here.' Bound souls remain attached to the world, that is, to 'lust and greed.' They remain sunk in the sordid sea and think they are very happy. Those who seek liberation and those who are liberated look upon the world as a deep well. They don't like it. Some of them who attain Knowledge, the vision of God, give up their bodies. But giving up the body in this way is very rare.

"Bound creatures, the worldly, do not wake up. They suffer so much misery, so many trials, so many sorrows. Even then they do not awaken.

"A camel likes thorny bushes, but the more it eats, the more its mouth bleeds. Yet it keeps on eating the same thorny bush; it doesn't stop. The worldly suffer so much agony, so much sorrow, yet they revert back to the old self quite soon. If a man's wife has died, or she has proved unfaithful to him, he marries again. Perhaps he has lost a son and suffered much sorrow, but he forgets all this in a few days. The mother of the boy, beside herself with grief, ties up her hair again and bedecks herself with jewelry. In the same way, though people spend all they have on the marriage of their daughters, they continue giving birth to more children year after year. They lose everything in litigation, yet they go again to court. They can't feed the children they have, neither can they educate them, nor can they look after them properly. Still they have more children every year.

"At times their state can be likened to that of a snake trying to swallow a mole. The snake can neither swallow the mole nor give it up. The bound soul may have realized that there is no substance to

the world – that it is like a hog plum containing nothing but stone and skin – yet he cannot give it up, cannot turn his mind to God.

"A fifty-year-old relative of Keshab Sen was playing cards – as if the time was not yet ripe for him to think of God!

"There is yet another sign of a bound soul. If he is lifted from worldly life to a spiritual environment, he will pine away to death. The worm that lives in dung only feels happy there – only there does it thrive. If you put that worm in a pot of rice, it will die." (*All laugh*.)

Chapter Three

asaṁśayaṁ mahābāho mano durnigrahaṁ calam ।
abhyāsena tu kaunteya vairāgyeṇa ca gṛhyate ।।

[O mighty armed, the mind is undoubtedly restless and hard to control, but by practice and non-attachment, O son of Kunti, it can be controlled.]

– Bhagavad Gita 6:35

Deep dispassion[1] and bound souls

Vijay: "What must be the state of mind for a bound soul to attain liberation?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "When one develops deep dispassion by the grace of God, one can be freed from the attachment to 'lust and greed.' What is deep dispassion? Mild dispassion is to let whatever is continue as it is, just to go on repeating the name

1. Vairagya: non-attachment.

of God. But in one who has deep dispassion, the prana (life breath) becomes restless for God, like a mother restless for the child in her womb. A person who has deep dispassion does not want anything but God. That person sees the world as a deep well and feels that he is drowning in it. He looks upon his relatives as venomous snakes and wants to run away from them. And he does run away. He doesn't think, 'Let me first make arrangements for my family and then I will think of God.' He has great resolve.

"What is deep dispassion like? Listen to a story. Once there was a drought in a certain part of the country. All the farmers were busy digging canals to bring water from a distance. One farmer had great determination. He resolved that he would go on digging until water from the river flowed along his whole canal. When the time came for his bath, his wife sent their daughter with some oil. The daughter said to him, 'Father, it's time for your bath. Massage your body with the oil and take your bath.' He replied, 'Please go away, I have some work to do.' It was past midday, and the farmer was still at work in his field. He had forgotten all about his bath. Now his wife came to the field and said, 'Why haven't you taken your bath yet? Your rice is getting cold. You always overdo things. If the work is not finished yet, do it tomorrow, or do it after your meal.' Taking his spade in hand, the farmer drove her off, scolding and shouting, 'You have no sense! There's been no rain. There is no crop. What will the children eat? Without food, we will all starve to death! I have vowed that I will bring water to the field today. After that, I will think

about bathing and eating.' Seeing his determination, the woman left. The farmer worked very hard throughout the day and joined the canal to the river in the evening. Then he sat on the bank and enjoyed watching the water gurgle into his field. He was now at peace and full of happiness. He went home and called to his wife, 'Now bring some oil and prepare a smoke.' In a carefree mood he took his bath, ate his meal, and retired to bed where he snored happily. This kind of determination illustrates deep dispassion.

"There was another farmer who was also trying to bring water to his field. His wife said to him, 'It's already late. Come on now. There's no need to work so hard.' Without much protest, this fellow put down his spade and said, 'Since you say so. I'm coming.' (*All laugh*.) This farmer could never bring water to his field. This is an example of mild dispassion.

"Just as a farmer can't bring water to his field without great determination, in the same way, only with great effort does a man realize God."

Chapter Four

āpūryamāṇam acalapratiṣṭhaṁ samudram āpaḥ
praviśanti yadvat ।
tadvat kāmā yaṁ praviśanti sarve sa śāntim āpnoti
na kāmakāmī ।।

[He into whom all desires enter as waters enter the full, unmoving sea, he attains peace; not so the desirer of desires.]

– Bhagavad Gita 2:70

Slaving for 'lust and greed'

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): "You used to come here so often. Why not recently?"

Vijay: "Sir, I want to come very much, but I'm not free. I have accepted work in the Brahmo Samaj."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): "'Lust and greed' bind a man. One loses one's freedom. When there is a woman, you need 'gold,' and for that, you have to be a slave to another person. A man loses his freedom and cannot act as he wishes.

"The priests of the Govindaji temple in Jaipur didn't used to marry. They had great spiritual and mental powers then. The king once sent for them, but they refused to go to him. Instead, they sent a message, 'Let the king come here.' After consulting his counselors, the king arranged for their marriage. Now the king no longer needed to send for them. They would come to him of their own accord, saying, 'Sir, I have come to shower my blessings. Here are some sacred flowers; please accept them.' They had to go to the king for everything – building a house, celebrating the rice-taking ceremony of their sons, putting their children through school, and so on.

"Twelve hundred nedas[1] and thirteen hundred nedis[2] – you know this story.[3] Nityananda Goswami's son, Virabhadra, had thirteen hundred nedas as his disciples. When they became

1. Shaven-headed Vaishnava monks.
2. Shaven-headed Vaishnava nuns.
3. Re: Bengali proverb '*Tar sakshi udam sari.*'

spiritually perfect, Virabhadra was alarmed. He thought, They have all become spiritually perfect, so anything they say will come true. There was reason to fear: wherever they went, people might come to grief by offending them unwittingly. Thinking this, Virabhadra called them to him and said, 'Go to the Ganges, perform sandhya and worship, and then come to see me.' The nedas had attained such spiritual perfection that they would go into samadhi when they meditated. When the flood tide came, they would not be aware of it. They would remain absorbed in meditation even when the ebb tide had receded. Now one hundred of the thirteen hundred nedas anticipated what Virabhadra would ask them to do. Thinking that they should not disobey their preceptor, they disappeared, never to see Virabhadra again. The remaining twelve hundred went to Virabhadra, who said to them, 'These thirteen hundred nedis will serve you. Please marry them.' 'As you please,' they said, 'but one hundred of us have disappeared.' So each of the twelve hundred nedas, had one nedi to serve him. After this, regardless of the strength of their austerities, their spiritual powers lessened. Living with women, they lost their powers because in their company they lost their independence.

(*To Vijay*) "You yourself have seen what happens when you accept employment under others. Many scholars who have studied English and passed many examinations are trampled every morning and evening under the feet of their [English] masters. The reason for this is lust. Having married and enjoyed the happy household fair, they now can't escape. That's why they put up

with so much suffering – from slavery and humiliation."

After God-realization women are worshiped as Mother

"Once you develop deep dispassion and realize God, you will no longer have attachment to women. Even if you live in the household, you won't feel that attraction – there is no danger then. Say there's a big magnet and a small one. Which will attract the iron with greater force? Surely the big one will exert a stronger pull. God is the big magnet. Compared to Him, woman is a small magnet. What can she do?"

A devotee: "Sir, should we hate women?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Those who have realized God do not look upon women with lustful eyes, so they have nothing to fear. They actually see that women are but manifestations of the Mother of the Universe, so they worship them all as the Mother.

(*To Vijay*) "Do come here now and then. I like to see you very much."

Chapter Five

The real religious teacher is one who has received the command of God

Vijay: "I have to do the work of the Brahmo Samaj, so I can't come often. I'll visit whenever possible."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): "Look here, the task of a religious teacher is very difficult. You can't teach people without having a direct command from God.

"If you preach without receiving a direct command, people won't listen. Such teaching carries no force. First of all one must attain God by practicing religious disciplines, or by any other means. Only after receiving His command can one teach. In Kamarpukur there is a pond called Haldarpukur. Every day people used to defecate on its banks. Those who came to the pond in the morning would shout at the offenders with foul language and in general create a great fuss. This did not stop the nuisance. The following day the banks would be covered with filth again. At last a government worker put up a notice: 'Stop defiling the banks. Offenders will be prosecuted.' After the sign was posted, nobody defecated there again.

"After receiving a command from God, one can be a religious teacher and give lectures anywhere. He who receives God's authority also receives power from Him. Only then can he perform the difficult task of a religious preceptor.

"When a simple tenant went to court against a big landlord, people knew there had to be a powerful man behind him. Perhaps another big landlord was fighting the case through this man. Man is insignificant. He cannot perform the difficult duty of a religious teacher without receiving direct power from God."

Vijay: "Sir, don't the teachings of the Brahmo Samaj liberate people?"

**Sat-chit-ananda Himself is the Guru –
It is He who liberates**

Sri Ramakrishna: "How is it possible for one man to liberate another from the bondage of the world? Only He who is the creator of this world-bewitching maya can liberate man from maya. Except for Sat-chit-ananda Guru, there is no refuge. How is it possible for those who have neither realized God nor received His command, who have not become powerful with His power, to liberate an embodied soul from the bondage of the world?

"One day I was going from the panchavati to the jhautala [pine grove] to answer the call of nature. I heard a bullfrog croaking loudly. I thought it must have been seized by a snake. After quite some time, when I was returning, I heard the frog still croaking, so I looked to see what was the matter. I saw that a nonpoisonous snake had seized it. It could neither release the frog nor swallow it. There was no end to the frog's agony. I said to myself, 'Had it been a cobra, the frog would have been silent after three croaks.' But it had been seized by a nonpoisonous snake, so the snake and frog were both suffering.

"The ego of an embodied soul ends with just three cries if one has a real teacher.[1] But if the guru is unripe, both the guru and the disciple undergo suffering. The disciple doesn't get rid of his ego or his bondage to the world. Falling into the hands of an unripe guru, the disciple does not attain liberation."

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1. Sadguru

Chapter Six

ahaṅkāravimūḍhātmā kartāham iti manyate||

[Deluded by egotism one thinks, 'I am the doer.']

– Bhagavad Gita 3:27

Liberation or God-realization comes as soon as maya, the veil of ego, goes

Vijay: "Sir, why are we bound like this? Why can't we see God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The very ego of man is maya. This egotism has veiled everything. 'All troubles cease when "I-ness" dies.' If by the grace of God a man realizes, 'I am not the doer,' he becomes a jivanmukta.[1] Then he has nothing to fear.

"Maya, or 'I-ness,' is like a cloud. The sun is not visible if there is even a patch of cloud. As soon as the cloud passes, one can see the sun. If, by the grace of the guru, the feeling of 'I-ness' vanishes, one sees God.

"Sri Ramachandra, the Lord Himself, was only two-and-a-half cubits away from Lakshmana, but maya in the form of Sita stood between them. The individual soul, Lakshmana, could not see the Lord. Just see, I'm creating a barrier in front of my face with this hand towel. You cannot see me, though I am so near. Similarly, God is so near to us all! Even then, we can't see Him because of the veil of maya.

"An embodied being is of the essence of Sat-chit-ananda, but because of maya or ego, it is covered

1. Liberated in this very life.

with various unreal qualities[1] and has forgotten its own real Self.

"Every unreal quality changes a person's nature. A man who wears a black-bordered dhoti is at once found to hum the love songs of Nidhu, or he begins to play cards, or automatically he picks up a stick to go for a walk! Even a sickly person begins to whistle as soon as he puts on English boots. And when he climbs stairs, he jumps from one step to the other like an Englishman. If a man is holding a pen in his hand, he begins to scribble the moment he finds a piece of paper.

"Money is also a great upadhi. As soon as money comes to a man, he becomes so different – he is no longer the same man.

"A brahmin who was outwardly very humble used to come here. After a few days I went to Konnagar. Hriday was with me. When I got off the boat, I saw the same brahmin sitting on the bank of the Ganges, probably enjoying the breeze. Seeing us, he said, 'I say, how are you, Thakur?' Hearing his tone, I said to Hriday, 'Oh Hriday, this man has acquired some money. That's why he is talking this way.' Hriday laughed.

"A frog had a rupee which he kept in a hole. One day an elephant walked over the hole. Rushing out angrily, the frog raised its foot at the elephant and cried, 'How dare you walk over me!' Such is the pride money breeds!"

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1. Upadhis: limiting adjuncts.

The seven planes – when does "I-ness" vanish – the state of brahmajnana

"You can get rid of I-consciousness when you attain spiritual knowledge. Attaining it, you go into samadhi, and only in samadhi does 'I-ness' disappear. But it is very difficult to attain spiritual knowledge.

"The Vedas say that 'I-ness' vanishes only when the mind ascends to the seventh plane. 'I-ness' only disappears upon attaining samadhi. Where does the mind generally dwell? In the first three planes – at the organs of sex, and of evacuation, and at the navel. At these planes the mind remains only attached to the world, to 'lust and greed.' When the mind dwells in the heart, one sees a divine light. Seeing it, one exclaims, 'Oh, what is this? What is this!' The next plane is at the throat. At this plane one likes to hear and speak only of God. When the mind goes to the forehead, between the eyebrows, one sees the form of Sat-chit-ananda. One has the desire to embrace and touch this very form, but cannot. Though the flame in a lantern can be seen, it cannot be touched. You feel as if you are just touching it – but you cannot. When the mind ascends to the seventh plane, 'I-ness' vanishes, and one goes into samadhi."

Vijay: "When the mind reaches there, one attains brahmajnana. What does one see then?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What happens when the mind ascends to the seventh plane cannot be described in words. Once a ship enters dark waters, it doesn't return. No one knows what happens to

the ship – and it cannot give us any information about the sea.

"Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the sea. No sooner did it enter the water than it dissolved. Now who could tell how deep the sea was? The one who was to tell had itself dissolved. The mind vanishes at the seventh plane and one attains samadhi. What one feels then cannot be described in words."

'I-ness' does not vanish – 'rascal I' and 'servant I'

"The 'I' that makes one worldly and attaches one to 'lust and greed' is the 'rascal I.' Because of it, the individual soul and the Atman appear apart. If a stick is put on water, the water appears to be divided into two. In reality the water is one, but it appears to be two because of the stick.

"'I-ness' is the stick. Remove the stick and the water will become one as before.

"What is the 'rascal I?' That which says, 'Don't you know me? I have so much money. Who's greater than I?' If a thief steals ten rupees, the victim first snatches the money back and then gives the thief a good beating. He doesn't leave him even then. He hands him over to the police and gets him punished. The 'rascal I' says, 'Don't you know who you robbed of ten rupees? Such impertinence!'"

Vijay: "If you can't experience samadhi and be freed from attachment to the world without getting rid of I-consciousness, it seems better to follow the path of brahmajnana to attain samadhi. If 'I-ness' persists in the path of devotion, it would seem better to take to the path of knowledge."

Sri Ramakrishna: "One or two can get rid of I-consciousness by experiencing samadhi, but usually 'I-ness' does not go. You may reason a thousand ways, but this 'I-ness' still finds its way back to you. Cut the ashwattha tree today, tomorrow morning you will see it sprouting again. So if 'I' does not go, let the rascal remain as the 'servant-I': 'O Lord, You are my Master, I am Your servant.' Live with this attitude. 'I am the servant,' 'I am the devotee' – there is no harm in this kind of 'I-ness.' Sweetmeats cause acidity in the stomach. But sugar candy is not counted among sweetmeats.

"The path of knowledge is very difficult. Knowledge can't be attained without ridding yourself of the conviction that you are the body. In the Kaliyuga life depends on food. With the conviction that I am the body, 'I-ness,' does not disappear. So the path of devotion is enjoined for the Kaliyuga. It is an easy path. If you sing His names and glories and pray to Him longingly from the core of your heart, you will attain God. There is no doubt about it.

"It's like drawing a line on the surface of water without placing a bamboo stick on it. You find that the water has been divided into two parts – but this line does not last. The feeling of the 'servant-I' or the 'I of a devotee' or the 'I of a child' is only like a line drawn on water."

Chapter Seven

kleśo 'dhikataras teṣām avyaktāsaktacetasām ।
avyaktā hi gatir duḥkhaṁ dehavadbhir avāpyate ।।

[It is more difficult for those whose minds are attached to the Unmanifest, because it is very hard for the embodied soul to reach the Unmanifest.]

– Bhagavad Gita 12:5

The path of loving devotion to God is the law of this age – the path of knowledge is very difficult – 'servant I,' 'I of a devotee,' 'I of a child'

Vijay (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Sir, you ask us to renounce the 'rascal I.' Is there any harm in the 'servant I'?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "One should have this ego – the 'servant I.' That is to say, 'I am the servant of the Lord, I am His devotee.' There's no harm in that. Rather, it leads to God-realization."

Vijay: "Well, sir, what is the nature of the feelings of lust and anger of a man who has the 'servant I?'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is only the semblance of lust and anger in the man if he has the right feeling. If he retains the feeling of the 'servant I' or the 'I of a devotee' after having God-realization, he can do no harm to others. After a sword has touched the philosopher's stone, it becomes gold; it has the semblance of a sword, but it can't kill anybody.

"The fronds of a coconut tree dry up and drop off, leaving only a mark [on the trunk]. One can

make out from these marks that there were once palm fronds there. Similarly, the ego of one who has realized God only leaves a mark, only a semblance of lust and anger. He is then like a child. A child is not subject to the three gunas [qualities] of sattva, rajas, and tamas. It takes the same amount of time for a child to give up something as it does for him to be attracted to it.

"You can take a child's piece of cloth worth five rupees by tempting him with a half-a-pice doll. He may first say firmly: 'No, I won't give it to you! My father bought it for me!' But everything is the same to a child; there is nothing big or small to him. He has no feeling of caste. His mother says, 'He is your elder brother.' Then even if he is a carpenter [low caste], the child will sit with him and eat from the same plate. A child hates no one; he has no feeling of purity and impurity. He doesn't bother to clean his hands with mud after relieving himself.

"Even after attaining samadhi some people live with the 'I of a devotee' or the 'I of a servant.' The devotee retains the feeling of 'I-ness': 'I am Your servant, You are my Master,' 'I am Your devotee, You are my Lord.' Even after God-realization one retains this 'I-ness.' One's 'I-ness' does not vanish completely. The practice of this feeling of 'I-ness' leads to God-realization. This is what is known as the path of devotion.

"By following the path of devotion, one can attain the knowledge of Brahman, too. God is omnipotent. He can also impart the knowledge of Brahman to a follower of the path of devotion. But generally speaking, a devotee does not seek the

knowledge of Brahman. He wishes to retain the 'I-ness' of 'I am Your servant, You are my Master,' 'I am Your child, You are my Mother.'"

Vijay: "Will the people who reason according to Vedanta also attain Him?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, He can also be attained by the path of reasoning and discrimination. This is known as Jnana Yoga. The path of reason is very difficult. I told you about the seven planes. When the mind reaches the seventh plane, one attains samadhi. On genuine realization that Brahman is real and the world illusory, the mind merges, and it experiences samadhi. But in the Kaliyuga, the life of a man depends on food. Then how can he understand that Brahman is real and the world illusory? Such awareness does not come without getting rid of body consciousness: 'I am neither the body, nor the mind, nor the twenty-four cosmic principles.[1] I am beyond pleasure and pain. How then can I have disease and sorrow, old age and death?' Such a realization is difficult in this Kaliyuga. However much you may reason, the conviction that I am the body creeps in somehow and shows itself. You may cut down an ashwattha tree and think its roots are dead, but the very next morning you will see that a new sprout has appeared. The feeling of the body does not go away. Thus the path of devotion is a good and easy path in this age.

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1. Twenty-four cosmic principles: see Section II, Chapter III.

"I don't want to become sugar, I want to taste it. I never feel like saying, 'I am Brahman.' I say, 'You are my Lord and I am Your servant.' It is good to play between the fifth and sixth planes. After crossing the sixth plane, I have no desire to stay on the seventh plane for long. My desire is to sing His name and glories. The attitude of the Master and the servant is very good. Look, everybody says that the wave belongs to the Ganges, not the Ganges to the wave. The feeling 'I am He' is not good. If a person entertains such a feeling of 'I-ness' but retains identification with his body, it will bring great harm to him – he won't advance further. And because he cannot understand his own predicament, he deceives others as well as himself. He gradually goes down spiritually."

Two kinds of devotion – most eligible aspirant – means to God-realization

"Devotion alone does not enable you to realize God. Unless you have intense love for God,[1] you cannot attain Him. Passionate devotion[2] is another name for intense love. Without intense love, you cannot realize God. Without loving God, you cannot attain Him.

"There is another kind of devotion known as ritualistic devotion.[3] You have to repeat the name of God a fixed number of times. Along with this, you must fast, go on pilgrimage, worship in a prescribed manner, make so many sacrifices, and so

1. Prema bhakti.
2. Raga bhakti.
3. Vaidhi bhakti.

on. These are all part of ritualistic devotion. By practicing it you gradually gain raga, intense devotion. But God cannot be realized as long as you don't have this intense love for Him. You must have love for Him. When your worldly way of thinking disappears completely and your mind goes to Him one hundred percent, only then do you attain God.

"But some people acquire loving devotion naturally. They are born that way. Being perfect from childhood, they weep for God at an early age, as Prahlada wept for Vishnu. Ritualistic devotion is like moving a fan to make a breeze. You need a fan to create a breeze. You will eventually attain love for God by repetition of the name, austerity, fasting, and such practices. But when the southern breeze blows of itself, you can put the fan aside. When intense love[1] for God comes of itself, rituals like repetition of the name, and so on drop off. When you are mad with love for God, how can you perform rituals?

"As long as you haven't acquired love for God, your devotion is unripe. When you have love for Him, your devotion is called ripe.

"A person who has unripe devotion cannot internalize spiritual instructions or talk about God. It is only when the photographer's glass is coated black with love for God, so to speak, that it catches an image and is retained. You may throw a thousand images on ordinary glass and not one of them will stay. As soon as the object is removed, the glass becomes the same as it was. You cannot

1. Prema.

internalize spiritual instruction unless you have developed love for God."

Vijay: "Sir, is love for God enough to attain Him, to have His vision?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, you can see God through love alone – but it must be ripe, prema bhakti, or raga bhakti. Only after gaining that kind of love can you love God as the son loves his mother, or the mother loves her child, or the wife loves her husband.

"When you have such love for God, you don't feel the attraction of maya – for wife, children, or dear relatives. You only retain compassion for them. The world then appears to be a foreign land, a land of duty alone. It's like having your home in a village and your place of work in Calcutta. You may have to live in a rented house in Calcutta for work. When you've gained love for God, you are completely rid of attachment to the world and of so-called worldly wisdom.

"If there is just a trace of worldliness, you can't see God. If a match-stick is wet, you may strike it a thousand times and it won't ignite; you will only waste a pile of matches. The mind attached to the world is like a wet match stick.

"When Srimati (Radha) said, 'I see Krishna everywhere,' her gopi friends[1] said, 'How? We can't see him. Are you delirious?' Srimati said, 'Friend, apply the collyrium of love to your eyes and you will be able to see him.' (*To Vijay*) A song of your

1. Sakhis.

Brahmo Samaj says: 'O Lord, is it possible to know You without love, however much one may perform sacrifices, worship, and the rest?'

"If you but once acquire this love, this longing, this ripe devotion, you will see Him both with form and without form."

God-vision not possible without His grace

Vijay: "How can one see God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Not until the mind is purified. Attached to 'lust and greed,' the mind remains soiled, it remains covered with dirt. If a needle is covered with mud, a magnet can't attract it. But when the mud and dirt are washed off, the magnet attracts. You can wash the dirt of the mind with the tears from your eyes. If you weep with tears of repentance, crying, 'O Lord, I shall never do such a thing again!' then this dirt is washed away and the magnet of God can attract the needle of the mind. You then go into samadhi and have the vision of God.

"But though you try a thousand times, nothing is achieved without God's grace. Without His grace, you cannot see Him. Is it easy to gain His grace? You have to get rid of your ego completely. When you have the feeling that you are the doer, you cannot see God. Suppose a man is in charge of the storeroom and somebody comes and says to the master of the house, 'Sir, please give me some provisions from your storeroom.' The master says, 'There's a man in the storeroom. I don't have to go there.' God doesn't appear easily in the heart of the person who feels himself to be the doer.

"Only after gaining God's grace can you have His vision. He is the sun of knowledge. With just one of His rays, this whole world is illumined. That's how we're able to know one another and acquire different kinds of knowledge in the world. If God only once brings His light to His own face, we can see Him. A police sergeant goes around at night with a lantern in his hand. Nobody can see his face. But in this light he can see everybody else's face, and others can see each other.

"If you want to see the sergeant, you must ask, 'Sir, be kind enough to turn the light on your own face so that I may see you.'

"You must pray to God, 'Lord, be kind enough to turn the light of knowledge on Your own face so that I may see You.'

"If there is no light in a house, it means poverty. You must light the lamp of knowledge in the heart: 'Lighting the lamp of knowledge in the house, behold the face of the all-blissful Mother.'"

Vijay has brought medicine with him and wishes to take it now. The medicine has to be taken with water, so Thakur asks that some be brought.

Thakur is a sea of motiveless grace. Vijay cannot afford a carriage or the boat fare to go to see Sri Ramakrishna, so now and then Thakur sends someone to bring him. This time he sent Balaram, who paid for the carriage in which Vijay accompanied him. In the evening Vijay, Nava Kumar, and others of Vijay's companions go to Balaram's boat. Balaram will take them to the Baghbazar ghat. M. takes the same boat.

The boat reaches the Annapurna ghat in Bagbhazar. When they are close to Balaram's residence in Baghbazar, the moon begins to cast a mellow light.

Today is the fourth day of the bright fortnight. It is winter and a bit chilly. Pondering the nectar-like teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and carrying his blissful image in their hearts, Vijay, Balaram, M. and the others return home.

Section V

Conversation with Amrita, Trailokya, and Other Brahmos at the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi

It is the fifth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Phalgun, Thursday, 19 Chaitra (29 March 1883). After his midday meal, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna is resting in his room at the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar. The Ganges is flowing west in front of the temple. Its flood tide started at two o'clock. A few devotees have arrived. Among them are the Brahmo devotee Amrita and the singer Trailokya, whose sweet songs of the glories of divine play have charmed the minds of young and old many times in Keshab's Brahmo Samaj.

Rakhal is not well. Sri Ramakrishna tells the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Look, Rakhal isn't well. Would soda water be of any help? I don't know what will happen. Rakhal, take some of Jagannath's prasad."

As he speaks, Sri Ramakrishna goes into an extraordinary state.[1] Perhaps he is seeing the Lord Himself taking the form of a boy in the body of Rakhal, who is sitting in front of him. This young devotee, pure in spirit, has renounced 'lust and greed.'

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1. Bhava.

Sri Ramakrishna, who himself remains inebriated day and night with the love of God, looks at him lovingly. The attitude of parent and child,[1] is natural to him, so perhaps he is looking upon this young boy, Rakhal, with the attitude of a mother toward her child. He begins to chant 'Govinda, Govinda' tenderly. He seems to be feeling the same emotion Yashoda felt when she saw Baby Krishna.

The devotees watch this amazing scene. Suddenly everything becomes very still. Uttering the name "Govinda," Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi. His body becomes as motionless as a picture, his sense organs seem to have ceased working, and his eyes are fixed on the tip of his nose. It is impossible to know if he is breathing. Only his body seems to be left on earth, the bird of his soul having soared into the sky of God-consciousness.

Where is he who was worrying with a mother's tenderness over her child? Is this amazing transformation of feeling known as samadhi?

Just then, dressed in the ochre cloth[2] of a monk, an unknown Bengali enters the room and sits on the floor.

Chapter Two

karmendriyāṇi saṁyamya ya āste manasā smaran ।
indriyārthān vimūḍhātmā mithyācāraḥ sa ucyate ।।

[He who sits, restraining the organs of action while letting his mind dwell on sense objects, deludes himself; he is called a hypocrite.]

– Bhagavad Gita 3:6

1. Vatsalya bhava.
2. Gerua.

The gerua cloth and sannyas –untruth is not good even in acting

Sri Ramakrishna's samadhi is gradually coming to an end. He talks in a state of ecstasy, as if to himself.

Sri Ramakrishna (*at the sight of the gerua cloth*): "Why this gerua? What can be achieved by merely wearing the cloth? (*Laughter*.) Somebody said, 'Giving up the Chandi, I have taken to the drum.' He used to sing the hymns of the Chandi, now he beats the drum. (*All laugh*.)

"Dispassion[1] is of three or four kinds. Having become burnt by the fire of the world, one puts on gerua. Such dispassion does not last long. Or perhaps a man is out of work, so he puts on the ochre cloth and leaves for Kashi. After three months his family gets a letter, 'I have a job now. I shall return home in a few days. Please don't worry.' And then there is the man who has everything, who lacks nothing, but does not enjoy anything. He weeps only for God. This kind of dispassion is genuine dispassion.

"Any untruth is bad. Even false garb is not good. If one's dress does not correspond to one's mind, it gradually brings complete ruin. By speaking lies or practicing falsehood, one gradually loses the fear of it. It is better to wear white clothes. When there is attachment in the mind and lapse of the ideal within while wearing gerua – this is dreadful!"

1. Vairagya.

Visit to Keshab's house and watching the *Nava Vrindavan*

"The point is that even while acting in a play, virtuous people should not use false words or do anything that's not true. I went to Keshab Sen's house to watch the play *Nava Vrindavan.* A person brought something on the stage called a cross, and then he began to sprinkle water, saying, 'It is the water of peace.' I also saw a man staggering around acting intoxicated."

A Brahmo devotee: "It was Ku-Babu."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's not good for a devotee to even play such a part. Keeping the mind on such matters for any length of time brings harm. The mind is like a fresh white cloth. It takes on the colour it's dipped in. By keeping the mind in falsehood for any length of time, it will take on the colour of falsehood.

"Another day I went to see the play *Nimai Sannyasa*[1] at Keshab's house. Some flattering disciples of Keshab spoiled the whole drama. One of them said to him, 'You are the Chaitanya of Kali.' Keshab looked at me and said with a smile, 'And what about him?' I said, 'I am the servant of your servants, the dust of your dust.' Keshab has a desire for name and fame."

1. The play depicting the sannyas of Sri Chaitanya.

Narendra and others are ever-perfect – they have inborn love and devotion

(*To Amrita and Trailokya*): "Narendra, Rakhal, and these youngsters are ever-perfect. They are devotees of God in every birth. Ordinary devotees attain a little devotion after practicing spiritual disciplines and austerities, but these boys have felt love for God since their birth. They are like the natural image of Shiva which comes from the earth and is not made by man.

"The ever-perfect are a class by themselves. Not every bird has a crooked beak. They are never attached to the world. There is the example of Prahlada.

"Ordinary people practice spiritual disciplines and have love for God, but they are also attached to the world, they are enchanted by 'lust and greed.' They are like a fly that sits on a flower, on sandesh,[1] and also on filth. (*All are still and silent*.)

"The ever-perfect are like bees, which sit only on flowers to sip honey. The ever-perfect drink the nectar of the Divine; they never seek worldly pleasures.

"The love and devotion of the ever-perfect is not like the ordinary devotion acquired by practicing spiritual disciplines. Performing so much repetition of the name and so much meditation is worshiping in a prescribed manner, is ritualistic devotion. It's like going around a rice field along the outside ridge to reach the other side. Or it's like going to a

1. A Bengali sweet.

village in a roundabout way along the banks of a winding river.

"When raga bhakti,[1] prema bhakti,[2] or love for God as one's near and dear one develops, one doesn't have to practice rituals any more. It's like crossing a rice field after the harvest. One doesn't have to walk along the ridge of the field, but can go straight across.

"When a river floods, you don't have to walk along its winding banks; when the field is pole-deep with water, you can go straight across it in a boat.

"You cannot realize God without that kind of passionate love, intense devotion."

The essence of samadhi – savikalpa and nirvikalpa

Amrita: "Sir, what do you experience in the state of samadhi?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Haven't you heard about the cockroach becoming a beetle by meditating on a beetle? Do you know how I feel? Like a fish released from a pot into the Ganges."

Amrita: "Isn't there the least trace of ego left then?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, usually a little ego remains. However much you may grind a little piece of gold on a grindstone, a small grain of it remains. Another example is a big fire and its spark. Outer consciousness disappears, but usually a bit of 'I-ness' remains for enjoyment. Enjoyment

1. Loving devotion for God.
2. Ecstatic love.

is only possible when there is 'I' and 'you.' But sometimes He effaces even this 'I-ness.' This is called jada samadhi – nirvikalpa samadhi. What this experience is cannot be described in words. A salt doll went to measure the depth of the sea, but it only went in a little way before it was dissolved. It became just like the sea. Then who was there to come back and give an account of how deep the sea is?"

Section VI

Conversation with Devotees about the Essence of Brahman and Primal Power at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple

Talk on Vidyasagar and Keshab Sen

Chapter One

It is Sunday, the third day of the dark fortnight in the month of Ashadha, 22 July 1883. The devotees have come again to see Sri Ramakrishna. They do not generally have the leisure to come on other days of the week. Adhar, Rakhal, and M. arrived at the Kali Temple from Calcutta at about one or two in the afternoon. They came in a hired carriage. Sri Ramakrishna has taken a little rest after his midday meal. Mani Mallick and some other devotees are also there.

The temple of Radhakanta and the temple of Bhavatarini[1] are located in the eastern part of the large courtyard of Rasmani's Kali Temple. The twelve Shiva temples are in the western area. Directly to the north of the row of Shiva temples is Sri Ramakrishna Deva's room. To the west of his room is a semicircular verandah. Looking west from there he watches the Ganges. Between the embankment of the Ganges and the verandah is an extensive flower garden belonging to the temple. It stretches from its southern boundary to the panchavati in the north where Sri Ramakrishna practiced austerities. On the east of the garden are

1. Saviour of humankind, a name of the Divine Mother.

two entrances. By the Paramahamsa Deva's room are a few poinciana trees.[1] Nearby are gardenia, kokilax, and white and red oleanders. On the inner wall of Sri Ramakrishna's room hang pictures of gods and goddesses, among them a picture of Christ holding Peter's hand to save him from drowning. There is also a stone image of the Buddha. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on a wooden cot, facing north. Devotees are sitting, some on the floor, some on a mat, and others on small carpets.[2] All of them are gazing at the great man's blissful figure. Not far from the room, along the western side of the embankment, the holy river Ganges flows south. It is as though the strong current of the rainy season is rushing to meet the sea, glancing on the meditation room of the great saint and touching it on its way.

Mani Mallick is a Brahmo devotee, sixty or sixty-five years old. A few days ago he visited Kashi.[3] Today he has come to see Thakur and is giving him an account of his visit.

Mani Mallick: "I met another sadhu. He said, 'Without control over the senses, nothing can be achieved. How does it help merely to cry, 'Lord, Lord?'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you know what people like that sadhu believe? That one must first practice spiritual disciplines: tranquility (shama), self-control (dama), and forbearance (titiksha). These people strive for nirvana. They are Vedantists. They only meditate on this: 'Brahman is real and the world illusory.' It is an extremely difficult path. If the world is illusory, then you too are illusory. Those who say so are also illusory, and

1. Krishnachuda, or gulmohar.
2. Asanas.
3. Benares, a place of pilgrimage.

what they say is also like a dream. It is a very abstruse philosophy.

"Do you know how it is? Like burning camphor that leaves no trace. When you burn firewood, you still get an ash residue. After ultimate reasoning comes samadhi. Then there is no awareness of 'I,' 'you,' and 'the universe.'"

Meetings with Pundit Padmalochan and Vidyasagar

"Padmalochan was a man of great spiritual knowledge. He had great respect for me, even though I repeated 'Mother, Mother.' Padmalochan was the court pundit of the King of Burdwan. He came to Calcutta and stayed in a garden house near Kamarhati. I felt some desire to visit the pundit, but I sent Hriday to find out if he had any vanity. I was told that the pundit had no ego. So I met him. Such a great jnani and such a pundit! Yet he began to weep when he heard me sing a song of Ramprasad's. The satisfaction I found in talking with him, I have never found with anybody else. He said to me, 'Give up your desire for the company of devotees. All these different people will bring your downfall.' Once he had a written discussion with Utsavananda, Vaishnavcharan's guru. He said to me, 'Let me tell you about it.' There was a discussion at a meeting about who was the greater, Shiva or Brahma. At the end of the discussion the pundits consulted Padmalochan. Padmalochan was so guileless he replied, 'Not one of my ancestors for fourteen generations ever saw Shiva or Brahma.' Hearing about my renunciation of 'lust and greed,' he said to me one day, 'Why have you given them up? This is money and that is clay. Such a feeling

of difference is the result of ignorance.' What could I say to him? I said, 'I don't know, my dear! I don't relish money and the like.'"

Charities of Vidyasagar, but gold lies buried within

"There was a pundit who was very vain. He didn't accept God with form. But who can understand the ways of God? He revealed Himself to the pundit in the form of Primordial Power. The vision made the pundit unconscious for a long time. After regaining a little consciousness he could only utter, 'Ka! Ka! Ka!' (that is, Kali) – just that syllable."

A devotee: "Sir, you have met Vidyasagar. What do you think of him?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Vidyasagar has scholarship, and he is kind, but he lacks insight. Gold lies buried within him. Had he discovered this gold, much of his external activities would have been reduced. Finally he would have given them up completely. Had he known that God resides inside, in the heart, his mind would have been directed to Him in meditation and contemplation. Some people develop dispassion after performing selfless work[1] for a long time. Their mind goes to God, and becomes absorbed in Him in the end.

"The kind of work Ishwar Vidyasagar does is very good. It is good to have compassion for others. There is, however, a great difference between compassion [daya] and attachment [maya]. Compassion is good; attachment is not good. Maya

1. Nishkama karma.

is love for one's own near and dear ones – wife, son, brother, sister, brother's son, sister's son, father, and mother – love for these. Compassion, however, is love for all beings equally."

Chapter Two

guṇatrayavyatiriktaṁ sacchidānandasvarupam ।

[The real nature of Sat-chit-ananda is beyond the three gunas.]

Brahman is beyond the three gunas, beyond speech

M.: "Is compassion [daya] also bondage?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That is a very subtle concept. Compassion comes from sattvaguna. Sattvaguna preserves, rajoguna creates, and tamoguna destroys. But Brahman is beyond the three gunas – sattva, rajas and tamas. It is beyond nature.[1]

"The gunas cannot really reach Brahman. They are like robbers who cannot go out in the open, afraid that they might be arrested. Sattva, rajas, and tamas – all three gunas – are robbers. Let me tell you a story:

"Once a man was going through a forest when three robbers came and caught hold of him. They robbed him of all he possessed. One of the robbers said, 'Why keep this man alive now?' Saying this, he stepped forward with a sword to kill him. The second robber then said, 'No brother, what use is it to kill him? Let's tie his hands and feet and leave him here.' Doing so, the robbers left him and went

1. Prakriti.

on their way. After a while one of them returned and said, 'Oh, you're suffering so much! Let me free you from the bonds.' Untying the man, he said, 'Come with me. I'll take you to the main road.' After a long time, when they reached the road, the robber said, 'Follow this road. See, there is your house.' The man then said to the robber, 'Sir, you have been very kind to me. Please come with me to my house.' The robber said, 'No, I can't go there. The police will come to know.'

"The world itself is a forest. In this forest sattva, rajas, and tamas are robbers. They rob a person of spiritual knowledge. Tamoguna wants to destroy him, and rajoguna binds him to the world. But sattvaguna saves him from rajas and tamas. By taking refuge in sattvaguna, one is saved from lust, anger, and other such evil effects of tamas. Besides, sattvaguna loosens the bonds of the world. But even sattvaguna is a robber. It can't give spiritual knowledge. What it does is put you on the road to God. Putting you on the road, it says, 'Just look, there is your home.' But sattvaguna remains at a great distance from the knowledge of Brahman.

"What Brahman is cannot be expressed in words. He who attains Brahman cannot give information about Him. There is a saying, 'A ship never returns once it reaches the black waters.'

"Four friends taking a walk came upon a high wall. Curious to know what was on the other side, one of the men climbed up to look. As he peeped over the wall, he exclaimed with wonder, 'Ah! Ah!' and he fell in. He gave no information. Each of

them climbed up and cried out, 'Ah! Ah!' and jumped in. Who could then tell what they saw?"

Jadabharata, Dattatreya, and Sukadeva – all knowers of Brahman

"After realizing Brahman, Jadabharata and Dattatreya could give no information about It. One's I-consciousness vanishes after passing into samadhi, after attaining the knowledge of Brahman. So Ramprasad says: 'If you cannot attain (the knowledge of Brahman) yourself, O mind, take Ramprasad with you.' The mind must dissolve. After that, Ramprasad, that is, the ego, must merge. Only then does one attain knowledge of Brahman."

A devotee: "Sir, didn't Sukadeva attain Ultimate Knowledge?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Some say that Sukadeva only saw and touched the ocean of Brahman but did not dive deep into It. That's why he could return and impart spiritual instruction. According to others, he returned after attaining the knowledge of Brahman in order to teach mankind. He had to narrate the Bhagavata to Parikshit and also teach people in various ways. So God didn't merge his 'I' altogether. His 'I of knowledge' was retained."

Instruction to Keshab – organization (sectarianism) is not right

A devotee: "Can one keep an organization intact after attaining the knowledge of Brahman?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "I talked to Keshab Sen about the knowledge of Brahman. Keshab said, 'Please

elaborate further.' I said, 'If I talk further, you will not be able to keep your organization intact.' 'Then please don't tell me any more, sir!' Keshab replied. (*All laugh*.) Then I said to him,"'I and mine" – these indicate ignorance. "I am the doer, this is my wife, that is my son, these are my possessions," honour, respect, and so on – such feelings arise because of ignorance.' Thereupon Keshab said, 'Sir, if you give up the "I," nothing whatsoever will remain!' I said, 'Keshab, I'm not asking you to renounce your "I" altogether. Only give up your "unripe I." "I am the doer, this is my wife or son, I am the guru," and so on – this pride is the "unripe I." Give it up. Renounce it and keep the "ripe I" – "I am His servant, I am His devotee, I am not the doer, He is the doer."'"

It is right to preach religion only when one has received God's command

A devotee: "Can the 'ripe I' create an organization?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "I said to Keshab Sen, 'I am the leader of the organization, I have made it, I impart instruction to mankind' – this 'I' is the 'unripe I.' It is very difficult to propagate religion. Without the command of God it cannot be done. His command is needed. For example, Sukadeva received the command to narrate the story of the Bhagavata. There's nothing wrong in preaching and instructing mankind after seeing God and having received His command. The 'I' of such a person is not the 'unripe I' – it is the 'ripe I.'

"I asked Keshab to renounce the 'unripe I.' There is no harm in having the 'I of a servant' or the 'I of a devotee.'

"You're talking about your organization. Many people are leaving it. Keshab said, 'Sir, during the last three years people from my group have returned to the other group. They spoke unkindly when they left.' I said, 'Why didn't you see their natures? This is what comes of making disciples indiscriminately.'"

Instruction to Keshab: accept the Primal Power

"And I said to Keshab, 'Accept the Primal Power. Brahman and Shakti (His power) are inseparable. He who is Brahman is Himself Shakti. So long as there is body consciousness, you are conscious of duality. They are two only in name.' Keshab later accepted Kali (Shakti).

"One day Keshab came here with his disciples. I said to him, 'I'd like to hear you lecture.' He delivered his lecture seated in the chandni. Then we sat at the ghat and had a long talk. I said, 'He who is Bhagavan[1] is Himself the devotee in another form. He Himself is also the Bhagavata (a scripture) in yet another form. You Brahmos, please say, "Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan." Keshab said it and his disciples also repeated together, 'Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan.' When I said, 'Please say, "Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava," Keshab said, 'Sir, not that far. If I say that, people will call me orthodox.'"

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1 . The Personal God as Lord.

Past story of his life – Sri Ramakrishna swoons on seeing the ways of maya

"It is very difficult to go beyond the three gunas. It is not possible before God-realization. The embodied soul lives in the domain of maya. This maya doesn't let one know God; it keeps a human being in ignorance. Hriday once brought a little calf. One day I saw that he tied it in the garden to graze. I asked him, 'Hriday, why do you tie it there every day?' Hriday replied, 'Uncle, I will send this calf to the village. When it grows, it will be yoked to the plough.' As he said these words, I became unconscious and fell down. I said to myself, 'Such are the ways of maya!' Kamarpukur and Sihore are so far from Calcutta! This little calf will tread so long a path! It will grow there. And later, after so many days, it will pull the plough – this is what is called the world, and this is what is called maya.

"It was after a long time that I regained consciousness."

Chapter Three

In samadhi

Sri Ramakrishna merges in samadhi day and night. How his days and nights pass! At times he talks of God or takes part in singing hymns with the devotees. At about three or four o'clock M. sees him seated on his smaller cot, lost in ecstasy. After some time he begins to talk to the Divine Mother.

Talking to the Mother, Thakur says, "Mother, why have You given him only one kala (one sixteenth part of divine power)?" He remains silent for a moment. Then he says, "I understand, Mother.

This one kala will be enough for him. Only one kala will enable him to do Your work – to preach to mankind."

> Does Thakur transmit spiritual powers to his inner and intimate disciples in this way? What is it all about? Later these disciples will teach humankind. Is he making arrangements for this?

Besides M., Rakhal is also there. Thakur is still in a divine mood. He says to Rakhal, "You were angry with me. Why did I reprimand you? There was a reason for it: to make the medicine work. When disease of the spleen advances, a leaf of mansa (a medicinal herb) has to be applied."

After a while he says, "I have seen that Hazra is like a dry piece of wood. Yet he lives here. Why? There's a reason for this. Without Jatila and Kutila (the trouble-making mother and sister-in-law of Radha), the play does not develop.

(*To M.*) "You must accept the forms of God. Do you know the significance of the Divine Mother in the form of Jagaddhatri? It is She who supports the world. If She doesn't support it, doesn't protect it, the world will fall, it will perish. Jagaddhatri only dawns in the heart of one who can tame the elephant of the mind."

Rakhal: "Mana-matt-kari." (The mind is a mad elephant.)

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's why the lion of Simhavahini (Durga, riding a lion) keeps the elephant under its control."

At dusk arati is performed in the temple. Sri Ramakrishna chants the names of the gods and

goddesses in his room. Incense has been burnt in the room. With hands folded, he is seated on the smaller cot, meditating on the Divine Mother. Govinda Mukherji of Belgharia and some of his friends enter the room, offer their salutations, and take their seats on the floor. M. and Rakhal are sitting there.

Outside the moon is shining and all of nature is still; it seems to be smiling. Inside, everyone is sitting quietly, gazing at the serene image of Sri Ramakrishna. He is absorbed in ecstasy. After a while, still in a state of ecstasy, he begins to talk.

The form of Shyama – Purusha and Prakriti – Yogamaya – Shiva and Kali, and Radha and Krishna – explanation of the forms – superior devotee – the path of reason

Sri Ramakrishna (*in ecstasy*): "Tell me if you have any doubt. I will explain everything to you."

Govinda and other devotees are thoughtful.

Govinda: "Revered sir, why is Shyama[1] dark?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's because She's at a distance. Go near and you'll find that She has no colour. The water in a pond looks dark from a distance. Go near it, take some in your hand, and you see that it has no colour. The sky appears blue from a distance. Look at the sky near you and you see that it is colourless. The nearer you go to God, the more you will realize that He has neither name nor form. Move a little away from Mother Shyama and you will find that She is the colour blue, like

1. Goddess Kali.

grass flowers. Is Shyama Purusha[1] or Prakriti?[2] A devotee was performing worship. Another man came and saw the deity wearing a sacred thread. He said, 'You have put the sacred thread round the Mother's neck!' The worshiper said, 'Brother, you alone have recognized the Mother. As for me, I have never been able to know whether She is male or female. That is why I have put a sacred thread round her neck.'[3]

"The One who is Shyama is also Brahman. The One who has form is also formless. The Being who has attributes is also without attributes. Brahman is Shakti, and Shakti is Brahman. They are inseparable – the male Sat-chit-ananda and the female Sat-chit-ananda."

Govinda: "What is the meaning of yogamaya?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yogamaya means the union of Purusha and Prakriti. Whatever you see is the union of Purusha and Prakriti. In the image of Shiva and Kali, Kali stands on Shiva; he lies like a corpse while Kali looks down at him. All this is the union of Purusha and Prakriti. Purusha is inactive, so Shiva is lying like a corpse. It is in conjunction with Purusha that Prakriti performs all Her actions. She creates, preserves, and dissolves.

"The dual image of Radha and Krishna [both Radha and Krishna in one piece] also signifies the same. Because of this union they are bent towards

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1. The Self, the Absolute, Spirit. Pure Consciousness, the witness of the changes of Prakriti.
2. Primordial Nature, composed of the gunas, the material of the universe of mind and matter.
3. Only the images of male deities wear a sacred thread.

each other. To denote this very union, Sri Krishna wears a pearl in his nose and Radha a blue stone in hers. Radha has the fair complexion of a bright pearl, while Sri Krishna is of dark complexion. It is for this reason that Radha wears the blue stone. Furthermore, Sri Krishna's apparel is yellow; that of Radha is blue.

"Who is the best devotee? The one who, after attaining the knowledge of Brahman, sees that God alone has become the universe and the twenty-four cosmic principles. One first reaches the roof by discriminating, 'Not this, not this.' Then he realizes that the steps are made of the same material as the roof – brick, lime, and brick-dust. Then he sees that Brahman Himself has become all living beings and the universe.

"Mere reasoning! I spit on it! I spit on it! It is of no use. (*Thakur spits on the ground.*) Why make yourself dry by reasoning? As long as you have the consciousness of 'I' and 'you,' you must have pure love and devotion at His lotus feet.

(*To Govinda*) "At times I say, 'You are I, and I am You.' And sometimes 'You' remains. The 'I' has then disappeared and is not traceable.

"It is Shakti that becomes the avatar. According to one school of thought, Rama and Krishna are but two waves of the Ocean of Bliss and Consciousness.[1]

"After attaining the knowledge of non-duality (advaita jnana) comes spiritually awakened consciousness (chaitanya). Then one sees that God

1. Chidananda.

alone exists in all things as Consciousness. After this realization comes ananda (bliss). Advaita, Chaitanya, and Nityananda.[1]"

The Lord has forms – longing for Him comes after desire for enjoyment vanishes

(*To M.*) "I say to you, don't disbelieve in the forms of God. Have faith that God has forms and meditate on the form that you love most.

(*To Govinda*) "Do you understand? As long as the desire for enjoyment remains, so long does one not feel the yearning to know God and attain His vision. A child plays with his toys, forgetting everything else. Cajole him with sandesh, he will eat just a piece of it. When he neither likes his toy nor enjoys the sandesh, he says, 'I want to go to my mother!' He doesn't need more sandesh. If a person he doesn't know and has never seen says to him, 'Come with me, I'll take you to your mother,' the child goes with him. He goes with anyone who will carry him in his arms to his mother.

"You develop yearning for God when you're finished with the enjoyment of worldly things. Then your only concern is to attain Him. You listen to anything anyone tells you about God."

M. (*to himself*), One yearns for God only when one has finished with desire for worldly enjoyment.

1. Non-duality, Consciousness, and Eternal Bliss.

Section VII

With Devotees at Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter One

Talk on Vedanta

Sri Ramakrishna is with the devotees at the Dakshineswar temple. It is Sunday, 19 August 1883, the first day of the dark fortnight in the month of Shravana. Only a short time ago the sanai[1] was played during the worship while food was offered to the deities.[2] The doors of the temple have been shut. Sri Ramakrishna has taken a rest after his midday meal and is now sitting on the smaller cot in his room. It is noon. M. enters and bows to him. After a while Sri Ramakrishna begins to talk to him about Vedanta.

Belief of Vedantists – talk about Krishnakishore

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Listen, the Ashtavakra Samhita talks about Self-knowledge. The knowers of the Self say 'So 'ham'; that is, 'I am that Paramatman (the highest Self).' This is the view of the sannyasins of the Vedantic school. But it is not suited for householders. They feel they perform all actions and duties themselves, so how can they say, 'I am that Paramatman beyond all action?' According to Vedantists, the Self has no attachment to anything. Pleasure and pain, virtue and vice, none of these can harm the Self. But they

1. A double-reed wind instrument, similar to an oboe.
2. Bhoga arati.

do afflict those who identify themselves with their bodies. Smoke soils a wall, but it cannot affect space. Krishnakishore used to talk like a jnani and say, 'I am kha,' that is, like space – but then he's a real devotee and can say that. It is not appropriate for others."

Vice and virtue – maya or compassion

"But to cherish the idea 'I am free' is very good. If you say again and again, 'I am free, I am free,' you become free. On the other hand, if you constantly say, 'I am bound, I am bound,' you indeed become bound. He who repeats 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner,' that wretch is sure to have a fall. Rather, one should say, 'I have chanted the name of God, what evil can befall me, what bondage?'

(*To M.*) "Look here, my mind is upset. Hriday[1] has written me a letter saying he is very ill. Is my concern maya or daya (compassion)?"

What can M. say? He remains silent.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you know what maya is? Love toward your relatives: toward father and mother, brother and sister, wife and son, nephew and niece – that is maya. But daya means love for all created beings. Well, what is it in my case – maya or daya? Hriday has done so much for me, served me so well. He has cleaned my excrement with his own hands. But he was equally hard on me

1. Hriday served Sri Ramakrishna for almost twenty-three years at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple, until the day of Snana Yatra Festival (the ceremony of Jagannath's going out in procession for a bath) in 1881.

at the end. He became so harsh that once I went to the embankment to throw myself into the Ganges to drown. But he has done a lot for me. If he could get some money, my mind would be at rest. But whom can I ask for it? I don't want to ask any of the gentlemen who come to see me."

Chapter Two

Clay image of the Divine Mother – vision of the Divine Mother Mrinmayi in Vishnupur

At two or three o'clock in the afternoon the great devotees Adhar Sen and Balaram Bose arrive. They prostrate before Sri Ramakrishna and sit down, asking him how he is. Sri Ramakrishna says, "Well, my body is all right, but my mind is a little disturbed."

He does not mention anything about Hriday's trouble.

The conversation turns to Goddess Simhavahini[1] in the house of the Mallicks of Burrabazar.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I went to see Simhavahini at the house of the Mallicks in Chashadhopa Para. The family lives in a dilapidated house in straightened circumstances, with pigeon droppings here, moss there, and lime and sand plaster crumbling off the walls. The prosperity that I have seen in the houses of other Mallicks was not in this one. (*To M.*) Tell me, what does this mean? Please tell me."

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1. The Divine Mother seated on a lion.

M. remains silent.

"Do you know what? Everyone must reap the consequences of his past actions. One has to accept that there are tendencies from past births[1] and the fruits of these actions are now being played out.[2]

(*To M.*) "And in that dilapidated house, I saw the face of Simhavahini beaming with glory. You have to believe in the divine presence in an image of the Deity.[3]

"Once I went to Vishnupur. The king has a beautiful temple there. There is an image of the Divine Mother called Mrinmayi. There are several lakes near the temple: Krishna-bandh, Lal-bandh and so on. Now tell me why I smelled the ointment used by women for their hair. I didn't know at the time that women devotees offer the goddess this ointment when they go to have Her darshan. I went into bhava samadhi near the lake, before I had seen the image. In that ecstatic state I had the vision of Mrinmayi from the waist up."

Pleasure and pain of the devotee – stories of the Bhagavata and Mahabharata

By this time some other devotees have arrived. The conversation turns to the coup and war in Kabul. One of them says, "Yakub Khan has been deposed." Addressing the Paramahamsa, he says, "Sir, Yakub Khan is a great devotee."

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1. Samskaras.
2. Prarabdha karma.
3. Avirbhava – manifestation, visible presence.

Sri Ramakrishna: "The fact is that pleasure and pain are the characteristics of embodiment. In Kavi Kankan's Chandi it is said that Kaluvir was sent to jail and stones were placed on his chest, though Kaluvir was a highly favoured child of the Divine Mother, Bhagavati. When one takes on a body, pleasure and pain come with it.

"Srimanta was a great devotee. And the Divine Mother had great affection for his mother, Khullana. Yet Srimanta suffered so much. He was taken to the cremation ground to be cut into pieces!

"A woodcutter was another great devotee. The Divine Mother granted him Her vision. She loved him immensely and bestowed on him much grace. Yet the woodcutter was not freed from work. He still had to earn his living by cutting wood. Devaki had the vision of the four-armed Lord Vishnu holding conch, discus, mace, and lotus, but her imprisonment did not end."

M.: "Why speak only of ending the imprisonment? This body is the source of all the trouble. It would have been better for her to be freed from the body."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The fact is that one reaps the fruit of those past actions which are producing results in this life.[1] One has to remain in the body until the results of those past actions wear out. Once a blind man had a dip in the Ganges. He was freed from all his sins, but his blindness was not cured. (*All laugh*.) It was the fruit of actions in his past life, so he had to bear it."

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1. Prarabdha karma.

Mani: "The arrow once shot is no longer under one's control."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Whatever the pleasure and pain of the body may be, a devotee's spiritual knowledge, the wealth of his love and devotion for God, endures. This treasure is never lost. Just see what calamities the Pandavas suffered! But they never once, in all their troubles, lost their spiritual consciousness. Where can you find such men of knowledge and devotion?"

Chapter Three

In samadhi – arrival of the Captain and Narendra

Just then, Narendra and Vishwanath Upadhyaya arrive. Vishwanath is the emissary of the king of Nepal and the representative of that kingdom. Thakur calls him Captain. Narendra is twenty-two years old and is studying for his B.A. He comes to Sri Ramakrishna at times, particularly on Sundays.

They salute Sri Ramakrishna and sit down. The Paramahamsa Deva asks Narendra to sing. A tanpura (stringed instrument) is hanging on the western wall of the room. Now, all eyes turn toward the singer while the banya[1] and the tabla are being tuned. They are all anxious for the singing to start.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "Listen, this one doesn't sound as good as it did before."

Captain: "It's filled to the brim, so there's no sound. (*All laugh*.) Like a pitcher filled to the brim with water.[2]"

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1. A semi-circular percussion instrument played along with tabla.
2. Purna kumbha.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Captain*): "But what about Narada and sages like him?"

Captain: "They spoke because they were moved by the sufferings of others."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. Narada and Sukadeva came down from samadhi out of compassion. They spoke for the good of others."

Narendra begins to sing:

Truth, goodness, and beauty[1] shine in the temple of my heart.

When will dawn that day when my mind, gazing on Him raptly, will dive deep into the ocean of that beauty divine?

When, O Lord, will infinite knowledge illumine my heart,

And this restless mind, made dumbfounded, take shelter at Your feet?

When, O Friend of my soul, will this mind be surrendered at the feet of the King of kings,

Where it will find peace and goodness without equal? Only there will the goal of my life be attained!

Where else can I find the grace of heavenly bliss while in this very body, in this very life?

O Lord, at the sight of Your pure, unblemished form, at the sight of Your radiance, the darkness of sin will flee, even as darkness is dispelled by light.

Just as the chakor[2] frolics in delight at the rising of the moon,

So too does bliss, like embodied nectar, well up in my heart as I, O Lord, become intoxicated with Your light.

---

1. Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram: Absolute Truth, Absolute Good, and Absolute Beauty, which are one.
2. A red-legged partridge.

O, Friend of the lowly, fulfil my desire and light in my heart a blazing faith, as bright and steady as the polestar.

Then shall I remain immersed both night and day in the joy of love, forgetting myself in the finding of You.

But when will dawn such a day?

When Sri Ramakrishna hears the words 'bliss, like embodied nectar,' he goes into deep samadhi. He sits with his hands folded, facing the east. His body erect, he dives deep into the ocean of beauty – the All-Blissful Mother. He has lost all external consciousness. One cannot even tell if he is breathing. He is still and unblinking, sitting like an image drawn on canvas, gone from this kingdom.

Chapter Four

Ways to attain Sat-chit-ananda – difference between a man of knowledge and a devotee

Sri Ramakrishna's samadhi comes to an end. When he was in samadhi, Narendra had left the room and gone to the eastern verandah where Hazra was sitting on a blanket with a rosary in his hand. Narendra and he had begun to talk. By now Sri Ramakrishna's room is full of devotees. He looks around at them when his samadhi is over. He finds that Narendra is not there. The tanpura is lying on the floor. All the devotees gaze at him with curiosity.

Sri Ramakrishna: "He has lit the fire. Now it does not matter whether he stays or goes. (*To Captain and the others*) Give your mind to the

Being of bliss and consciousness[1] and you will also feel joy. The bliss of God-consciousness is always there, it is only hidden by a veil. The less you are attached to the senses, the more the mind will go towards God."

Captain: "The more you proceed toward Calcutta, the farther you go from Kashi; and the more you proceed toward Kashi, the farther you will be from your home."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The more Radha advances toward Krishna, the more she smells the sweet fragrance of his body. The more one advances towards God, the more one gains fervour[2] and loving devotion to Him. The more a river advances to the sea, the more one sees its ebb and flow.

"The Ganges flows only in one direction within a man of knowledge. For him everything is like a dream. He always dwells in his own true Self. Within a devotee the Ganges does not flow only in one direction; it has its ebb and flow tides. The devotee laughs and weeps, sings and dances. The devotee wants to enjoy God. Sometimes he swims; sometimes he dives; other times he rises – just as a piece of ice floats up and down in water." (*Laughte*r.)

1. Chidananda.
2. Bhava.

**Sat-chit-ananda and Sat-chit-anandamayi –
Brahman and Primal Power are inseparable**

"The jnani wants to know Brahman, but the devotee wants the Almighty Lord possessed of the six kinds of spiritual wealth. The fact is, Brahman and Shakti are inseparable. He who is Sat-chit-ananda is Himself Sat-chit-anandamayi.[1] For example, take a jewel and its lustre. When you talk of the lustre of a jewel, you think of the jewel – and when you talk of the jewel, you think of its lustre. Without knowing the jewel, you cannot know its lustre. Without knowing the lustre of a jewel, you cannot know what the jewel is.

"There is but one. Sat-chit-ananda is associated with different adjuncts because of differing manifestations of power. God has many forms – 'Thou art He, O Mother.'[2] Where there is action (of creation, preservation, and dissolution), there is Shakti (Power). It is water, whether it is still or has ripples and bubbles over its surface. The same Sat-chit-ananda is Himself the Primal Power who brings about creation, preservation, and dissolution. When Captain is not working, he is still Captain, and when he is worshiping, he is the same being. When Captain goes to the Governor General, he is still the same – he is only assuming a particular role."[3]

Captain: "Quite right, sir."

---

1. All-Knowing, All-Intelligent and All-Blissful Mother of the Universe.
2. Tara.
3. Adjunct.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I said the same to Keshab Sen."

Captain: "Keshab is deficient. He is self-willed; he is a gentleman, not a sadhu."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Captain doesn't want me to visit Keshab."

Captain: "Sir, I can't do anything about your going."

Sri Ramakrishna (*irritated*): "You can go to the Governor General for money but I can't go to Keshab Sen! He meditates on God and chants His name. You yourself say that one God has become all living beings and the universe, 'Ishwara maya jiva jagat.' "

Chapter Five

With Narendra – synthesis of Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga

Saying this, Thakur leaves the room abruptly and goes to the northeast verandah. Captain and the other devotees wait for him to return. M., however, accompanies him to the verandah, where Narendra is talking with Hazra. Sri Ramakrishna knows that Hazra, who is given to dry reasoning, says, "The world is like a dream; all worship and offerings are mental delusions. One's only aim is to meditate on one's own true Self: 'I am That.'"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Well, what are you talking about?"

Narendra (*smiling*): "We're talking about all kinds of things. We've been talking a long time."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "But pure knowledge and pure devotion are the same. Pure devotion takes you to the same place that pure knowledge does. But the path of devotion is smooth and easy."

Narendra (*quoting a song*): "'I have no need to reason. Mother, grant that I may be mad with Your love!' (*To M.*) Look, I've read Hamilton. He wrote, 'A learned ignorance is the end of philosophy and the beginning of religion'".

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "What does that mean, brother?"

Narendra: "When one completes the study of philosophy, one becomes a 'learned fool.' Then he begins to talk on religion. His religion starts then."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Thank you, Thank you[1]!" (*Laughter.*)

Chapter Six

Chanting the name of God as evening approaches – many qualities of Narendra

After some time, seeing the evening draw nigh, most of the people depart. Narendra also leaves.

It is getting late, almost evening. The temple lighting attendants[2] are arranging for light all around. Two priests of the Kali and the Vishnu Temples are standing waist-deep in the Ganges to purify themselves, body and soul, before they perform the evening arati and offer the evening meal to the deities. Young men of Dakshineswar village, some

1. Sri Ramakrishna actually used these English words.
2. Faras.

> with walking sticks, some with friends, have come out for a stroll in the garden. They walk along the embankment to enjoy the pure evening breeze made fragrant with flowers and to watch the slightly undulating breast of the fast-flowing Ganges in this month of Shravana. Some, perhaps more reflective than others, are strolling through the solitary panchavati. Sri Ramakrishna stands on the western verandah watching the Ganges for a while.
>
> By the time darkness has fallen, the lamp men have lighted all the lamps. A maidservant comes to Sri Ramakrishna's room, lights his lamp, and burns incense.
>
> In the meantime arati has begun in the twelve Shiva temples. Soon after, it begins in the temples of Vishnu and Kali. Cymbals, gongs, and bells begin to ring in sweet solemnity, as the murmuring Ganges flows close by.
>
> It is the first day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravana. In a short time the moon appears. The big courtyard and the tops of the trees in the garden are bathed by rays of moonlight as is the water of the Ganges flowing so joyfully.

When evening falls, Sri Ramakrishna bows to the Mother of the Universe and chants 'Haribol,' clapping his hands. In his room are images of many gods and goddesses: of Dhruva, Prahlada, King Rama, Mother Kali, and Radha-Krishna. He bows down to all the deities, repeating their names, and then he says, "Brahman-Atman-Bhagavan, Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan, Brahman-Shakti, Shakti-Brahman; Veda, Purana, Tantra, Gita, Gayatri. My only refuge, my only refuge. Not I, not I, but You, only You. I am just the instrument, You are the Being who uses the instrument," and so on.

After repeating these divine names, Sri Ramakrishna meditates on the Divine Mother, his hands folded. Some of the devotees walk on the bank of the river. Soon after arati is over, they come, one by one, and assemble in the Paramahamsa's room. He is sitting on the bed. M., Adhar, Kishori and others are sitting in front of him on the floor.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Narendra, Bhavanath, and Rakhal are ever-perfect souls. They belong to the class of the ishvarakoti.[1] Teaching them is not necessary. For example, Narendra doesn't care for anybody. He was with me in Captain's carriage. When Captain asked him to take a comfortable seat, he didn't even look at him. He is independent even of me. And he doesn't say what he knows lest I tell others in his presence that he is very learned. He has no delusion, no attachment – free from bondage. He is very talented in so many things – vocal and instrumental music, reading and writing. At the same time he has control over his senses. He says that he won't marry. There is a great affinity between Narendra and Bhavanath – as between husband and wife. Narendra doesn't come here very often. That is good. I become overwhelmed if I see him too often."

1. Eternally free and perfect souls.

Section VIII

Visit of Sri Ramakrishna to Sinduriapatti Brahmo Samaj

Conversation with Vijaykrishna Goswami and others

Chapter One

In samadhi

The eleventh day of the dark fortnight in the month of Kartik, 26 November 1883. The Sinduriapatti Brahmo Samaj holds its sessions at the house of Manilal Mallick on Chitpur Road. It is at the southern corner of Harrison Road, a little north of the shops that sell pomegranates, apples, other fruits, and pistachios. The Samaj holds its session in the first floor hall on the side of the house near the main road. Today is its annual session and Manilal has made suitable arrangements for the occasion.

The worship room is full of joy today, decorated inside and out with green leaves and various flowers and garlands. Devotees sitting in the hall are waiting for the worship to begin. There is not enough space for everybody in the room, so a number of them are pacing the western roof or are sitting on the beautifully made colourful benches placed here and there. At times the master of the house and family come to greet the devotees with sweet words. The devotees have begun to arrive in the late afternoon, inspired with a special zeal today because Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa Deva is to come. He is loved by the Brahmo devotees because of his great affection for their leaders – Keshab, Vijay, Shivanath, and others. He is intoxicated with the wine of divine love for God. This love, together with a burning faith,

childlike conversations with the Divine Mother, tearful yearning, a worship of women as Mother, avoidance of all worldly talk, and his incessant talk about God like an unbroken flow of oil, his harmony of religions and absence of the least trace of contempt for other religions, his tearful cry for the devotees of God – all these things have attracted the minds of Brahmo devotees. That is why so many people have come from distant places to have his darshan.

Shivanath and speaking truth

Sri Ramakrishna talks happily with Vijaykrishna Goswami and other Brahmo devotees. The assembly room has been lighted. Worship is to begin soon.

Sri Ramakrishna says: "Brother, why isn't Shivanath coming?"

Brahmo devotee: "Well, he is very busy today. He will not be able to come."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I feel very happy when I see Shivanath. He seems drenched in the bliss of love for God. Besides, when so many respect him, there is certainly some divine power in him. But Shivanath has a serious defect: he does not keep his word. He once told me he would come to the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar, but he didn't show up. He didn't even send word. That isn't right. It is said that truthful speech is the austerity in this Kaliyuga. By sticking to truth, one realizes God. By not sticking to truth, one gradually loses everything. Keeping this in mind, if I say I'm going to answer the call of nature but then feel no need to, I take a wash pot and go to the jhautala anyway. My concern is that I might ultimately lose my regard for truth. In this state of mind, I took

flowers in my hand and said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, here is your knowledge, and here is your ignorance; take them both, and grant me pure love. Here is your purity, and here is your impurity; take them both, and grant me pure love. Here is your good, and here is your evil; take them both, and grant me pure love. Here is your virtue, and here is your vice; take them both, and grant me pure love.'

"When I said these things, I could not say, 'Mother, take your truth and take your untruth.' I could give up everything to the Divine Mother – but I could not give up truth."

The worship starts according to the Brahmo system. The preacher is on the platform; a lantern illumines him. After the initial ceremony, he chants verses from the Vedas on the supreme Brahman. The Brahmo devotees begin to chant together the ancient words of the Aryan rishis. They chant: "Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, and the Infinite. It shines as Bliss and Immortality. It is Peace, All-Good, One without a second. It is pure and untouched by sin."

The chanting, filled with the sound of 'Om,' resounds in the hearts of the devotees. Most of them have almost entirely relinquished worldly desires. Their minds have become quite steady and meditative. They all sit quiet for some time, eyes closed in contemplation of the qualified Brahman of the Vedas.

The Paramahamsa Deva is overwhelmed with divine emotion. His body still as a picture, his eyes fixed, he is speechless. The wings of his soul are

flying elsewhere in joy. Only his inert body remains, as if emptied out.

As soon as his samadhi is over, Sri Ramakrishna opens his eyes and looks around. He notices that everyone at the meeting is sitting with closed eyes. With the words "Brahman! Brahman!" he suddenly stands up. Then, as the worship ends, and with the accompaniment of drum and cymbals, the devotees sing. Intoxicated with the joy of ecstatic love,[1] Sri Ramakrishna joins them in dance. Everyone is charmed to watch his graceful dance. Vijaykrishna and other devotees also begin to dance, encircling him. Watching this wonderful scene and enjoying the communal singing, many forget the world for some time. Drunk with the wine of God's name, they have begun to feel that worldly joy is, indeed, bitter; they forget worldly pleasure for a while.

When the devotional singing ends, they all sit around Thakur to hear what he is going to say.

Chapter Two

Advice to householders

Sri Ramakrishna addresses the assembled Brahmo devotees: "It is very difficult to lead a householder's life without attachment. Pratap used to say, 'Sir, we follow King Janaka. He lived a householder's life, but without attachment. We shall do the same.' I said, 'Can you become King Janaka just by wishing to? King Janaka gained spiritual knowledge after much austerity! He

1. Prema.

returned to his family only after undergoing extremely hard austerities – like standing on his head for years.'

"Does that mean there is no way for householders? Certainly there is. A householder should practice religious disciplines in solitude for some days. By doing so, a person develops love and devotion for God and gains spiritual knowledge. After this, there is nothing wrong in going back and leading a family life. When a man practices spiritual disciplines in solitude, he must separate himself completely, by all means, from the household – from wife, son, daughter, mother, father, brother, sister, near relatives. No one should stay with him. During solitary spiritual practice, he should say to himself, 'I have no one in the world to call my own. God is my all in all.' He should weep persistently and pray for spiritual knowledge and love and devotion for Him.

"If you ask how many days you should live away from the family, even one day is good, but three days are still better. You can live for twelve days, a month, three months, a year – as long as possible. After gaining knowledge and loving devotion to God, there is not much danger in living a householder's life.

"If you rub your hands with oil before you cut a jackfruit open, its sticky juice won't stick to your hands. When playing the game of hide and seek, you are safe if you touch the granny. Touch the philosopher's stone once and you become gold. After turning into gold, something may be buried

underground for a thousand years and will still be gold when you take it out.

"The mind is like milk. If you keep it in the water of the world, the milk will get mixed with water. You must transform the milk into curds in a lonely corner to take the butter from it. When, by practicing spiritual disciplines in solitude, you've taken out the butter of spiritual knowledge and love for God from the milk of the mind, then that butter can easily be kept in the water of the world. It will never get mixed with the water. It will float on the surface, free from any attachment."

Chapter Three

Solitary spiritual disciplines of Vijaykrishna Goswami

Vijay Goswami has recently returned from Gaya. He spent quite a few days in solitude and lived in the company of sadhus. He has now taken to wearing the ochre cloth. He is in a very good state of mind – as if always drawn within. He keeps his head bent before the Paramahamsa Deva, as if absorbed in contemplation of God.

Looking at Vijay, Sri Ramakrishna asks him: "Vijay, have you found a place to stay?

"Listen to this. Two sadhus came to a city during their wanderings. One of them was looking with curiosity at the bazaar, shops, and residential quarters of the town when he came across the other sadhu. The latter said, 'You're going around the city agape. Where is your luggage?' The first sadhu replied, 'I found a place to stay.[1] I've locked my

1. Vasa.

belongings there. Now I've come out to wander around the city without having to worry about them.' That's why I'm asking whether you've found a place to stay. (*To M. and the others*) Look, the fountain within Vijay has been covered for so long. Now it's open."

Vijay and Shivanath – selfless work – sannyasin's renunciation of desire

(*To Vijay*) "Look, Shivanath has so many problems. He has to write for the newspaper, among many other things. Worldly work causes restlessness and brings anxiety and worry to the mind.

"The Srimad Bhagavata talks about the twenty-four gurus of the Avadhuta (Rishi Dattatreya), one of which was a kite. Some fishermen were catching fish at a certain place when a kite came swooping down, grabbed one of the fish, and carried it away. Seeing it, some thousand crows flying in formation followed the kite, cawing and creating a great nuisance. Whatever direction the kite flew with the fish, the crows followed. The kite flew south and the crows went south. When it flew north, the crows did the same. When the kite flew to the east or to the west, they followed. At last when the kite became confused and began flying around in circles, it dropped the fish. The crows left the kite and flew after the fish. The kite then sat on the branch of a tree and thought to itself, That fish created all this trouble. Now that I have no fish, I am at peace.

"The Avadhuta learned from the kite that as long as one has the fish of desire, there is work to

do. And because of work, there is worry, anxiety, and restlessness. As soon as one gives up desires, work no longer binds[1] and one is at peace.

"That is why working without expectation of any reward is good. It does not bring restlessness. But it is very difficult to do. I may think that I'm doing selfless work, but somehow selfish motivation creeps in, from where I don't know. Only with the power that comes from a great deal of spiritual disciplines are a few able to work selflessly. After God-realization, selfless work comes automatically. With God-realization, a person can almost give up work. Only one or two (like Narada) keep working to teach others."

Sannyasin will not hoard – renunciation of work only after developing intense love for God[2]

"The Avadhuta had another guru, a bee. The bee collects honey by labouring hard for days on end, but the honey is not its own. Someone comes and breaks the honeycomb and takes away the honey. The Avadhuta learned from the bee that one should not hoard. Sadhus should depend one hundred percent on God. They should not accumulate things.

"However, this is not true for householders. A householder must take care of his family, so he has to save. Birds and sadhus don't lay things away – but a bird does accumulate when it has a chick; it collects food in its beak for its chick.

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1. Karmakshaya.
2. Prema.

"Look here, Vijay. If you see a sadhu with baggage or a bundle of things tied with fifteen knots, don't trust him. I saw such sadhus under the banyan tree. Two or three of them were sitting there. One was separating good lentils from bad, the other was repairing his dhoti,[1] and they were talking of feasts given by rich men. They were saying, 'I say, that gentleman has spent hundreds of thousands of rupees. He fed the sadhus so well! He prepared puris, jilibis, peras, barfis, malapuas, and all sorts of things.'" (*All laugh.*)

Vijay: "Yes, I saw sadhus like that in Gaya, too. In Gaya, sadhus swindle." (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): "When you develop ecstatic love for God, work falls off automatically. Let those act whom the Lord makes act. Your time has come now. Giving up everything, you should say: 'O my mind, may you and I behold Her and no one else!'

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna sings in his exquisitely sweet voice, showering the sweetness of God:

> Cherish the beloved Mother Shyama in your heart.
>
> O mind, may you and I alone behold Her, and let no one else intrude. Leaving behind all passions, anger and such vices, come, O mind, and let us behold her in solitude,
>
> Taking with us only the tongue, that it may call on Her now and then, repeating, "Mother, Mother!"
>
> O mind, allow neither baseness nor enticement to draw near, but let the eyes of knowledge, ever alert, keep watch.

---

1. A wearing cloth.

(*To Vijay*) "You have taken refuge in God. Now shun the feelings of shame, fear, and the like. Give up the feeling that if you dance and sing the name of God, people will say things about you."

Feeling of shame, contempt, and fear

"When you have the feelings of shame, hatred, and fear, you cannot succeed. Feelings of shame, hatred, fear, pride of caste, secretiveness, – these are all bonds. The embodied soul is liberated only when he is free of them.

"He who is bound is embodied (jiva), and he who is free from bonds is divine (Shiva). Love for God is very rare. If you have single-minded devotion[1] to God, like a wife has for her husband in the beginning, only then do you develop love for God. Pure selfless love is very difficult to attain. In it, the soul and mind lose themselves in Him.

"Then comes the state of bhava.[2] In bhava man becomes speechless. His breathing stops – he automatically experiences suspension of breath,[3] as happens when a man fires a gun. A marksman firing a bullet becomes speechless, and his breathing stops.

"Attaining intense love for God is very rare. Chaitanya Deva attained it. When you have ecstatic love for God, you forget external objects, you forget the world. You forget even your own body which is so dear to you."

---

1. Nishtha bhakti.
2. Ecstasy.
3. Kumbhaka.

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing again:

When will dawn that day when tears stream from my eyes as I repeat Lord Hari's name?

When will dawn that day when worldly desires disappear from my heart?

When will dawn that day when my body thrills and my hair stands on end?

When will dawn that day?

Chapter Four

Bhava and suspension of breath – vision of God when spiritual current rises

While the conversation continues, many other invited Brahmo devotees arrive. Several are learned, some occupying high positions in the government. One of them is Rajni Nath Ray.

Sri Ramakrishna says, "In a high spiritual state,[1] breathing stops." He further says, "When Arjuna aimed at his target, his sight was fixed solely on the eye of the fish. He didn't see anything else. He didn't see any other part of the fish but the eye. In such a state, breathing stops and a person experiences retention of breath.

"There is another sign of God-vision: The spiritual current[2] from within rushes up toward the brain. At that time, if you attain samadhi, you realize God."

1. Bhava.
2. Mahavayu.

Mere learning itself is deceptive – riches, power, honour, and rank all illusory

(*Looking at the Brahmo devotees who have just arrived*) "Those who are merely learned and have no love for God say conflicting things. There was a pundit, Samadhyayi by name, who said, 'The Lord is totally devoid of love, joy, sweetness, and bliss.[1] Make Him sweet[2] by your intense love and devotion for Him.' He who is called the Essence of Bliss[3] in the Vedas was termed devoid of sweetness by this fellow. This only shows that the man didn't know at all what God really is. That is why he talked so absurdly.

"Somebody said, 'There is a cowshed full of horses in my maternal uncle's house.' From this you understand that there was not a single horse – horses are not kept in cowsheds. (*All laugh*.)

"People are proud of wealth, possessions, property, honour, rank, and so on. But these last for only a few days; nothing will accompany you at death. A song goes like this:

> Consider this, O mind: no one is your own. In this world there is mere illusion.
>
> Do not forget the beneficent Mother by getting ensnared in Her maya's net.
>
> Think of those over whom you fret almost unto death: in death would they accompany you?
>
> Even your beloved wife would deny you and shun your corpse as something impure.

---

1. Neeras.
2. Saras.
3. Rasasvarupa.

Just for a day or two do people call you lord and master; they will cease to call you so when the master called Death arrives for you.

The great remedy for pride –
there are others greater than you

"You shouldn't be proud of your money. If you think you're wealthy, another is wealthier than you, and still others wealthier than he. After dusk a firefly comes out and thinks it lights the world. But as soon as the stars appear, its pride takes a fall. The stars then begin to think that they are lighting the world. After some time, when the moon appears, the stars are dimmed in shame. The moon then begins to think that the whole world is smiling because of its light, that it is lighting the world. But not much later comes the dawn. And then the sun rises and now the moon is dim. In a short time it is invisible.

"If wealthy people were to think this way, they wouldn't take pride in their wealth."

Manilal has arranged for a big feast in connection with the festival. He serves food to Sri Ramakrishna and the assembled devotees with great love and attention, and to their heart's content. It is quite dark when they begin to leave for home, but no one feels inconvenienced.

Section IX

Visit to the House of Jaygopal Sen

Chapter One

Family life and Sri Ramakrishna

It is 28 November 1883. At about four or five in the afternoon, Sri Ramakrishna went to the Lily Cottage of Keshab Chandra Sen. Keshab has been ill and will soon leave this world. After visiting him, Thakur comes with some devotees to the house of Jaygopal Sen on Mathaghasha Street. It is after seven in the evening.

The devotees are thinking about many things: We see Thakur day and night overwhelmed with the love of God. He is married but has not established a conjugal relationship with his wife. He has love and devotion[1] for her and worships her, but he only talks about God with her. He sings of God, worships God, meditates on Him; he has no worldly connection. He sees that God is the only Reality and all else is unreal. He cannot touch money or any metal object – jug or bowl. He cannot touch a woman; if he does, his body shivers at the spot as if stung by a singi fish. His hand twists when money or gold is placed in his palm, like a cripple, and his breathing stops. When he throws them away, he begins to breath normally, as before.

The devotees think of many questions, such as: Will we have to renounce the world? What is the need for studying anymore? If we don't marry, we won't have to get a job. Will we have to leave our parents? Or: I

1. Bhakti.

have married, I have children, I have to take care of my wife – what about me? I also want to remain absorbed in the love of God day and night. When I see Sri Ramakrishna, I say to myself, What I am doing? Day and night he meditates on God, like an unceasing flow of oil. But I am running around all the time thinking about worldly things. Just his presence is like a small spot of light in a sky overcast with clouds. Oh, how can I solve the problem of my life?

He has given the example of his own personal practice. Why do I still have doubts?

Shall I break this dam of sand and fulfill my desire? Is this (world) really a sand dam? If so, why can't I give it up? I see that I'm not strong enough. When I have developed that sort of love for Him, I won't calculate. If a tide flows in the Ganges, who can stop it? If one has just a drop of the ecstatic love[1] which made Sri Chaitanya put on the loin cloth, or the intense love for God that moved Christ to go into exile without consideration of anything else and made him give up his body after having a vision of the face of his loving Father, or the ecstatic love that made the Buddha give up his princely luxury and become a renunciate,[2] then the transitory world can be cast away.

So what is the way for those who are weak, who have not developed ecstatic love, who are worldly beings tied by the fetters of maya? I won't leave the company of this great soul intoxicated with love for God, who looks for nothing but God. Let me see what he says.

All these thoughts occupy the minds of the devotees. Thakur is sitting in Jaygopal's drawing room. Seated in front of him are Jaygopal, his family, and some of his neighbours. One neighbour, ready for discussion, starts the conversation. Vaikuntha, Jaygopal's brother, is also there.

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1. Prema.
2. Vairagi.

Family life and Sri Ramakrishna

Vaikuntha: "We are worldly people, please tell us something."

Sri Ramakrishna: "After knowing God, keep one hand on His lotus feet and attend to your worldly duties with the other."

Vaikuntha: "Sir, is this world unreal?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is unreal until you know God. Man forgets Him and thinks, 'Mine, mine.' Bound by maya, deluded by 'lust and greed,' he goes down and down. Entangled so in maya, he has lost his senses. He can't find a way out, even when there is a way. There is a song that says:

> With her magic what a spell Mahamaya casts! Even Brahma and Vishnu have lost their senses. What, then, can mere mortals hope to know?
>
> When a trap for fish is set, they enter, and though the way out is clear, they fail to emerge.
>
> The silkworm spins its own cocoon and surely can escape; yet by Mahamaya's delusion bound, it emerges not but remains within to die.

"You yourselves are able to see that the world is transitory. Why don't you see this very family as transitory? So many people have come and then departed, so many born and then died. The world now is and then is not – it is ephemeral. They whom you call 'my' and 'mine' are not there as soon as you shut your eyes at death. A person might not have close relations – but still does not go to Kashi because of a grandson: 'What will happen to my Haru?' There is a way out, yet the fish do not

escape. The silkworm dies in its own secretions. This world is unreal, it is impermanent."

Neighbour: "Sir, how can I hold to God with one hand and the world with the other? If the world is transitory, why should I hold onto it with even one hand?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you live in the world after knowing Him, the world is no longer ephemeral. Listen to this song:

O mind, you do not know how to farm.

The field of your life lies fallow; were you to cultivate it, you would reap a golden harvest.

Fence it around with Kali's name, and your crop will not be harmed.

That fence of the Mother with long flowing hair is strong indeed: not even Death himself dares come near.

Not today or in a hundred years will your crops be snatched away.

Work now, O mind, to reap your harvest to the full. Sow the seed, your guru's gift,[1] and shower it with the water of love.

If you cannot do so by yourself, take Ramprasad along.

Chapter Two

How to realize God in family life

Sri Ramakrishna: "Did you hear the song, 'Fence it around with Kali's name, and your crop will not be harmed'? Take refuge in God and you'll get everything. This fence of the Divine Mother with long flowing hair is very strong. Not even

1. Mantra.

Yama, the God of Death, dares to approach it. It is a very strong fence. If you can realize God, the world will appear unimportant. Whoever knows God sees that He Himself has become the world, its creatures, and all that. You will feed your boy as though you were feeding Gopal.[1] You will see your father and mother as God and the Divine Mother, and you will serve them as though they were. If you live in the family after knowing God, you won't maintain a worldly relationship with your wife. Both of you, being devotees, will talk only of God, only of divine matters. You will serve the devotees of God, knowing Him to be present in all existence. Both of you will serve God."

Neighbour: "Sir, such a husband and wife can be found nowhere."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, there are such people, but they are rare. Worldly people cannot recognize them. But both of them have to be good to reach that state. This is possible only when both derive divine joy from it. For this, God's special grace is necessary. Without it, there is always misunderstanding between them, and one of them has to leave. There is great discord if they don't agree. The wife may possibly complain day and night, 'Why did father give me away in marriage to this family? Neither have I myself eaten well, nor have I been able to feed my children. Neither have I good clothes to wear, nor do my children. You have given me not a single piece of jewelry. What joy of life have you given me in this house? You keep on

1. Baby Krishna.

repeating 'Lord, Lord' with your eyes closed. Give up this type of madness!'"

Devotee: "There are such obstacles, of course. Then the sons may be disobedient! How troublesome that is! So what is the way, sir?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is very difficult to practice spiritual disciplines while living in the family. There are so many hindrances. I don't have to tell you about these – disease, sorrow, poverty, discord with wife, and sons who are disobedient, ignorant, and foolish.

"Even so, there is a way. Occasionally you must go into solitude and pray to God. You should make an effort to attain Him."

Neighbour: "Should one leave the family?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's not necessary. But whenever you are free, go to a solitary place and live there for a day or two so that you are detached from family affairs and don't have to talk of worldly things to any worldly person. Either live in solitude or keep the company of the holy."

Neighbour: "How do we recognize a holy person?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A holy person is one whose mind, heart, and soul are merged in God. He who has renounced 'lust and greed' is a holy person. A man who is holy doesn't see a woman with a carnal eye. His mind is always drawn within. If he happens to be near a woman, he looks upon her as Mother and worships her. A holy person is always thinking inwardly of God. He talks of nothing but Him. And knowing that God is present in all

existence, he serves Him. Broadly speaking, these are the characteristics of a holy person."

Neighbour: "Does one always have to live in solitude?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Think of a tree on a footpath. As long as it's small, it has to be fenced on all sides; otherwise, a goat or a cow might eat it. But when the plant develops a thick trunk, no fence is needed. Then, even if an elephant is tied to it, the tree doesn't break. If you can develop the trunk, there's no worry, no fear. First try to gain discrimination. If you rub your hands with oil before you cut open a jackfruit, its milky sap will not stick to your hands."

Neighbour: "What is discrimination?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That only God is real,[1] all else is unreal.[2] Thinking this way is discrimination. 'Real' means eternal, and 'unreal' means transient. Whoever has attained discrimination knows that God is the only reality, that all else is unreal. When you've developed discrimination, you want to know God. If you are inclined to the unreal, you like physical comforts, name and fame, money, and all these things. You don't feel the need to know God, who is Reality Himself. When you know the difference between the real and the unreal, only then will you want to seek God. Listen to this song:

> Come, O mind, let us go for a walk to Kali, the wish-fulfilling tree and gather there the four fruits of life.

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1. Sat.
2. Asat.

Of your two wives, Worldliness and Dispassion, take only Dispassion along, and ask her eldest son, Discrimination,[11] for the truth about Reality.

When will you lie down happily between your wives, Purity and Defilement? When you see no difference between these two, then shall you see the Divine Mother Kali.

Drive out your parents, Ego and Ignorance, and should Delusion attempt to drag you into its pit, hold fast to the post of Patience.

Tie the goats of Virtue and Vice to the post of unconcern, and should they become unruly, kill them both with the Sword of Knowledge.

Admonish, O mind, the children of your first wife, Worldliness, and tell them to keep their distance. Should they not obey you, then drown them in the Sea of Knowledge.

Ramprasad says: If you can do this, you will render a proper account to the Lord of Death, and I shall be pleased to call you "my dear one," a mind after my own heart.

"You attain discrimination only when dispassion comes to the mind. When you have attained discrimination, you begin to think of the truth. Then the mind has the desire to stroll under the kalpataru (wish-fulfilling tree) of Kali. When you are under this tree, when you are near God, the four fruits come to you effortlessly. You have only to pick them up – the fruits of dharma (righteousness), artha (wealth), kama (fulfillment of legitimate desires) and moksha (liberation). When a householder attains Him, whatever he needs – dharma, artha, or kama – he gets."

Neighbour: "Why is the world called maya?"

Vishishtadvaitavada (Qualified Non-dualism) and Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna: "As long as you have not realized God, you must renounce, saying, 'Not this, not this.' Those who have realized Him know that He has become all – God, maya, individual souls, and the universe.[1] Then they perceive that the world and its beings are nothing but God. If you were asked to weigh a bel fruit, having its shell, kernel, and seeds separated out, would you remove its shell and seeds and weigh only the kernel? No, you would also have to take into account the shell and the seeds – all these – while weighing. You can tell the weight of a bel fruit only when you weigh all of it. This world is the shell, creatures are the seeds. While reasoning, the world and its creatures are called anatman (not the Atman); they are considered unreal. While discriminating, you feel that only the kernel is important, not the shell and the seeds. But then we consider that the shell and the seeds belong to the same substance to which the kernel belongs. Understand the illustration of the bel fruit and you will understand.

"It is the process of evolution and involution. Butter goes with buttermilk and buttermilk goes with butter. If there is buttermilk, there is butter; if there is butter, there is also buttermilk. If there is Atman, there is anatman (non-Atman) too.

"The Absolute belongs to the same Being as the phenomenal world, and the phenomenal belongs to the same as the Absolute. He who is called Ishvara

1. Ishvara, maya, jiva, and jagat.

has Himself become the individual being and the world. He who has understood this knows that God Himself has become all – father, mother, son, neighbour, man and beast, good and bad, purity and impurity."

Sense of sin and responsibility

Neighbour: "So, there is no sin and no virtue?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "They are, and yet are not. If God keeps the ego in you, He also keeps your sense of differentiation and the knowledge of virtuous and sinful acts. However, in a few, God completely erases the sense of I-consciousness. Such people go beyond virtue and vice, good and bad. As long as a person doesn't realize God, the sense of differentiation and the knowledge of good and bad are bound to persist. You may say that vice and virtue have become one for you, that you do only what He makes you do, but in your heart you know that these are mere words. When you do evil deeds, your heart palpitates.

"However, even after God-realization, if He so wills, He lets you retain the 'servant I.' In that state the devotee says: 'I am Your servant, You are my Master.' Such a devotee likes to hear talk about God, likes to work for God. He doesn't like people who are opposed to God; he doesn't like work, except work for God. When this comes about, God lets such a devotee retain a sense of differentiation."

Neighbour: "Sir, you say that we should live in the world after knowing God. Can we know Him?"

The Unknown and the Unknowable

Sri Ramakrishna: "He cannot be known by the senses or the mind. He can only be known by the pure mind, the mind that has no worldly desires."

Neighbour: "Who can know God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Who can really know Him? It is enough to know as much as one needs. What is the need for a whole well? A jug of water is enough. An ant went to a mound of sugar. What need had it for the whole mound? A grain or two made it happy."

Neighbour: "What can a single jug of water do for the delusions[1] we have? I want to know God fully."

The world – aberration and its remedy – take shelter in Me

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, that may be true. But there is a remedy for the delusion of the world."

Neighbour: "What is the remedy, sir?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The company of the holy, chanting His name and glories, and constant prayer to Him. I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, I don't want knowledge. Take Your knowledge and take Your ignorance. Mother, kindly grant me only pure love at Your lotus feet. I want nothing else.'

"As is the disease, so is the remedy. The Lord says in the Gita, 'O Arjuna, take refuge in me, I shall free you from all your sins.' Take refuge in

1. Vikara; A bodily or mental condition which obstructs God-realization.

God. He will grant you right understanding. He will take up your whole burden. Then all your defects and aberrations will be wiped away. Can you understand Him with this intellect of yours? Can a one-seer jug contain four seers of milk? Besides, can anybody understand God unless He makes him understand? So I say, take refuge in God. Let Him do what He wills. He has His own way in everything.[1] What power does man have?"

1. Icchamaya.

Section X

Festival in Surendra's Garden

Chapter One

Thakur rejoices with the devotees

Today Thakur has come to Surendra's garden. It is Sunday, 15 June 1884, the sixth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Jaishtha. Thakur has been enjoying the company of the devotees since nine in the morning.

Surendra's garden is in the Kankurgachi district near Calcutta. Not far away is Ram's garden,[1] which Thakur visited some six months ago. Today there is a festival in Surendra's garden.

Group singing of devotional songs[2] began earlier in the morning. The songs are about the life of Sri Krishna in Mathura. They describe the ecstatic love of the gopis and the sorrow of Radha at her separation from Sri Krishna. Every now and then Thakur is overwhelmed with ecstasy.

The devotees stand in rows in the garden house. The singing is going on in the main hall of the garden house. A white sheet has been spread on the floor, with bolsters here and there. The hall is flanked on the east and west by rooms, one on each side, and there is a verandah running north and south. In front of the garden house – that is, to the south – is a beautiful pond with specially built brick steps. Between the hall and the steps, a garden path runs

1. Sri Ramakrishna had mentioned the garden as an ideal place for meditation, so Ram named it "Yogadyan" (a place for practicing yoga).
2. Sankirtan.

east-west. On both sides of the path are flower bushes, croton trees, and other plants. Another path runs from the eastern edge of the garden house to the north gate. It is surfaced with red brick dust and is bordered on both sides with various flowering bushes and croton trees. Near the gate and to the east of the path is another pond with cement steps. The men of the neighbourhood take their bath here and fetch drinking water. On the west side of the garden house is a path, and southwest of it is the kitchen. There is a great deal of activity here today in preparation for the feast to serve Thakur and the devotees. Suresh and Ram are supervising.

The devotees have assembled on the verandah of the garden house as well. Others stroll on the bank of the pond mentioned earlier, either alone or with friends. Some stop at the cement steps for a rest during the stroll.

The songs continue. A crowd of devotees has assembled in the hall. Bhavanath, Niranjan, Rakhal, Surendra, Ram, M., Mahimacharan, Mani Mallick, and many others are there. Many Brahmo devotees are also present.

The songs of Mathura are being sung. The singer begins with *Gaur Chandrika* (verses of Chaitanya Deva's adoration). Gauranga had taken sannyas; he was mad with love for Krishna. The devotees of Navadvip wept in distress to see him. The chorus is singing: "Gaur, please come to Nadia."

Thereafter, they sing of Radha's anguish at separation from Krishna. Thakur is overwhelmed with ecstasy. He suddenly stands and adds lines full of pathos to the song: "Friend, either bring me

the beloved of my soul[1] or take me to him." Thakur goes into the mood of Radha. He becomes speechless as he says these words, his body still, his eyes half-closed. He has lost all consciousness. Thakur has gone into samadhi.

After some time he regains normal consciousness. Again, with the same plaintive tone, of the gopis, he says, "Friend, make me your slave and take me to him! I shall become your maidservant forever! It is you who taught me to love Krishna, the beloved of my soul."

The chorus goes on singing. Radha says, "Friend, I shall not go to the holy Jamuna to fetch water. I saw our beloved friend (Krishna) under the kadamba tree. When I go there, I become overwhelmed."

Thakur is again overcome with emotion. Taking a long breath, he heaves a sigh: "Ah! Ah!"

The song continues. Radha says:

> The desire for Krishna's presence has refreshed my feverish body.

Now and then the musicians improvise verses: "Perhaps He will become yours. Please let me see Him once, O friend! The Jewel of Jewels is gone. What need have I now of other jewels? My good days are over. I have fallen again on evil times. Haven't my evil days lasted long enough?"

Thakur adds: "Has that time not yet come?"

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1. Pranavallabha.

The chorus sings: "So much time has passed! Has that time not yet come?"

The singing continues:

O friend! I am surely dying.

To whom shall I leave my Krishna,[1] my priceless treasure?

Friend, do not cremate this, Radha's body, or cast it into the river, this body that has been enjoyed by the Dark One.

Neither cast it into the water, nor consign to the flames, but bind it, when I die, to the tamal tree,

And keep it there, bound close to the tamal's blackness – so that it may keep on getting its touch.

My Krishna is black, and the tamal is black. Black is the colour I dearly love and from my earliest days have cherished.

See that my body be not parted from my Krishna, my Dark One, to whom it belongs.

In her tenth stage, Radha falls into a faint.

Radha, lying fallen on the ground, has lost all outer consciousness while repeating Krishna's name.

How, then, has this joyful play come to such an end?

At this moment her eyes are closed; how has this happened to Radha, who only a moment ago was speaking to us?

Someone anoints her body with sandal paste, while the others lament: "Our beloved soul departs!"

They sprinkle water on Radha's face, hoping to revive her, but can mere water save one who is dying from love for Krishna?

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1. Kanai.

Seeing Radha in a swoon, her friends chant the name of Krishna. Hearing the name, Shyam,[1] she regains consciousness. Then seeing the tamal tree, she thinks that perhaps Krishna himself has come to her.

> By Krishna's name restored to life, Radha looks round and round, searching, searching.
>
> Failing to find her beloved's face, she weeps the bitterest of tears,
>
> Crying "Where is Sri Dam,[2] whose name you chant? Bring him here that I may see Him once, just once."
>
> Then catching sight of the black tamal tree, Radha exclaims, "Behold! There is my Krishna's crest!"
>
> Spying a peacock in the tree, she sighs, 'There you see His feathered crest!"

Her friends decide to send a messenger to Mathura. The messenger makes friends with a resident woman of the city, a woman of her age, who asks for her credentials.

Radha's messenger friend says, "I will not have to call him. He will come on his own." She then goes with the Mathura woman to where Krishna is and calls out, weeping, with a longing heart. "Where are you, O Hari, the life of the gopis, the beloved of my soul, Radha's sweetheart, the allayer of shame? Come show yourself. I have said with great pride that you will come of your own accord."

The song continues:

> A woman of Mathura laughs in scorn, saying,

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1. A name of Krishna.
2. A name for Krishna.

"O lowly milkmaid, how can you, dressed in beggar's rags, hope to see Him,

"The king, who dwells beyond the seventh gate? How, oh how, will you ever reach Him?

I am ashamed at your boldness. Tell me, how will you ever enter there?"

"Alas! Alas!," the milkmaid cries, "O Krishna, the gopis' very life, you philanderer! Where are you? Show Yourself and save now the maid who yearns for You!

"O life of the gopis, where are You? Master of Mathura, show Yourself and save her heart and soul!

"Where are you, Hari, the beloved of Radha! O Hari, allayer of my shame, reveal Yourself and save my honour!"

The messenger woman then calls out, "You, life and soul of the gopis, you philanderer! Where are you, the milkmaids' beloved?"

Hearing this, "Where are you, the life and soul of the gopis," Thakur goes into samadhi. When the songs end, the chorus sings the name of the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna[1] stands up again in samadhi. Regaining consciousness a little, he says, indistinctly, "Kittan, Kittan (Krishna, Krishna)." He is absorbed in divine emotion, so he cannot pronounce the name (of Krishna) properly.

The chorus sings about Radha being united with Krishna.

Thakur adds:

Look, Radha is standing,

Turning round and swaying,

Standing now to the left of Shyam,

1. Prabhu, Master.

Like a creeper embracing the tamal tree.

Now they sing the names of the Lord, accompanying themselves with drums and cymbals: "Victory to Radha Govinda! Victory to Radha Govinda!" All are seized with the madness of love for God.

Thakur dances. The devotees also dance, forming a ring around him and chanting, "Victory to Radha Govinda! Victory to Radha Govinda!"

Chapter Two

Guilelessness and God-realization – service of God and duties of the world

When the music ends, Thakur sits for a while with the devotees. Niranjan arrives and prostrates before him in salutation. Seeing him, Thakur stands up and, with a joyful expression, says, "So you have come!

(*To M.*) "Look, this boy is remarkably simple. Such openness and simplicity doesn't come without a great deal of austerity in previous births. A cunning and calculating person can't realize God.

"Don't you see that wherever God has incarnated Himself, there has been guilelessness?

"How simple was Dasharatha![1] Nanda Ghosh, Sri Krishna's father, was free from guile. The saying goes, 'What a nature he has! Exactly like that of Nanda Ghosh!'"

1. Father of Lord Rama.

The devotees are free from guile. Is Thakur hinting that God has incarnated Himself again?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Niranjan*): "It looks like a shadowy film has spread over your face. This is because you work in an office. You have to keep accounts and perform so many other duties there that you are always worried.

"You have a job, like other men of the world. But there is a little difference. You have accepted the job for the sake of your mother.

"A mother is venerable. She is the very embodiment of the all-blissful Mother of the Universe. If you had taken up a job for your wife or son, I would have said, 'Fie on you! You are accursed! A hundred times shame on you!'

(*To Mani Mallick*) "Just see, this boy is free from guile. He has only one fault: sometimes he tells a fib. One day he said he'd come, but he didn't show up. (*To Niranjan*) That's why Rakhal asked you why you didn't come to see me, even though you came to Ariadaha."

Niranjan: "I only went to Ariadaha a couple of days ago."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Niranjan*): "He's a headmaster. He went to see you. I sent him. (*To M.*) Did you send Baburam to me the other day?"

Chapter Three

Radha and Krishna – the ecstatic love of the gopis

Thakur is talking with three or four devotees in the western room. A number of chairs and tables have been placed together.

Thakur is leaning on a table, half standing and half sitting.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Oh, what love and devotion the gopis had! They would be seized with the madness of love just to see the tamal tree! Such was the fire of separation burning in Radha's heart that tears from her eyes would dry up from its heat – the tears would just evaporate. Sometimes people didn't know of her divine emotion. When an elephant enters a big lake, no one notices."

M.: "Yes sir, it was the same with Gauranga (Chaitanya Deva). When he saw a forest, he thought he was in Vrindavan; when he saw the ocean, he thought it was the Jamuna."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Oh, if a person could receive just a drop of this ecstatic love! What devotion! What love! Not only sixteen annas[1] of love, but five sikas[2] and five annas! This is called the madness of love. The important thing is to love Him, to have longing for Him. Then you may take whatever path you like, whether you believe in God with form or God without form, whether you believe that God incarnates as a man or not. It is enough to have

1. Full complement.
2. One sika equals four annas; sixteen annas make one rupee.

devotion for Him. He Himself will then tell you what He is.

"If you must be mad, be not mad for the things of this world. Be mad for God!"

Chapter Four

Conversation about God with Bhavanath, Mahima, and other devotees

Thakur returns to the hall. They have placed a bolster near his seat. While sitting down, he touches the bolster and murmurs, "Om Tat Sat."[1]

> Worldly people often visit this garden; they all use this very bolster. Perhaps Thakur recites the sacred words to purify it from the contamination of their worldliness.

Bhavanath, M., and some others sit beside him. Though it is already dark, they have not yet laid out the feast.

Thakur has the nature of a child. He says: "Why haven't you fed us? Where is Narendra?"

A devotee (*laughing, to Thakur*): "Sir, Ram Babu is in charge. He is supervising everything." (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "Ram in charge! That is the reason!"

A devotee: "Sir, it's always like this when Ram Babu is in charge."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Where is Surendra?

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1. The Lord is the only Reality.

"Oh, what a fine temperament he has developed. He is very frank – not afraid to speak up. And how generous he is! He never turns anyone away who asks for his help. (*To M.*) Did you go see Bhagavan Das? How did you find him?"

M.: "Yes sir, I went to Kalna. Bhagavan Das is very old now. I saw him in the evening. He was lying on a cotton bed sheet and someone fed him prasad. He is only able to hear when you speak loudly. Hearing your name, he said, 'What is there for you to worry about now?'

"There is worship of the name of Brahman in that house."

Bhavanath (*to M.*): "You haven't been to Dakshineswar for a long time. He was asking me about you. He said, 'Perhaps M. has developed a distaste.'"

Saying this, Bhavanath begins to laugh. Thakur has been listening to the conversation between them. With eyes full of affection, he says to M.: "Yes, yes. Why haven't you been to Dakshineswar for such a long time? Tell me."

M. stammers a lame excuse.

Just then Mahimacharan arrives. Mahimacharan, a resident of Cossipore, has great reverence for Thakur. He often visits Dakshineswar. He belongs to a brahmin family and has inherited some ancestral property. He lives independently and has not taken a job under anyone. He spends most of his time studying the scriptures and meditating on God. He is a man of

some learning. He has studied a number of books in English and Sanskrit.

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing, to Mahima*): "What is this? A big ship has arrived! (*All laugh*.) Only canoes come here, but look! This is a ship! (*All laugh*.) But then it is the month of Ashadha (month of rains)."

Thakur talks for a long time to Mahimacharan.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahima*): "Feeding others is also a kind of service to God. What do you say? God is in all beings in the form of the fire of hunger. Feeding someone means making an offering to Him.

"Even so, at [religious] feasts one shouldn't feed a wicked person, such as those who have committed adultery, fornication, and other vile sins, those who are drowned in sensuality. The earth on which they stand is polluted more than seven cubits deep.

"Once Hriday fed people in Sihore, many of them wicked. I said to him, 'Look here Hriday, if you feed these people, I shall leave your house immediately.' (*To Mahima*) Well, I heard that you used to feed many people. Perhaps the expenses have now gone up." (*All laugh*.)

Chapter Five

With Brahmo devotees

Leaf plates are now being placed on the southern verandah. Thakur says to Mahimacharan, "Please go there and see what they're doing. I can't ask you, but maybe you could help a little in serving the food."

Mahimacharan says, "Let them bring the food first. Then I'll see if I can do anything." Hemming and hawing, he goes to the verandah but soon returns.

Thakur sits down to eat with the devotees. He is filled with great joy. After the meal he rests a while. The devotees go to the southern pond, wash, and again assemble near Thakur, who is chewing betel leaves. They all sit down. Pratap, a Brahmo devotee, arrives a little after two o'clock and salutes Thakur. Thakur salutes him as well, bowing down to him. He talks about a number of things with Pratap.

Pratap: "Sir, I went to the hills (Darjeeling)."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But you don't look healthy. Are you suffering from some illness?"

Pratap: "Sir, I'm suffering from the same disease as Keshab."

They begin to talk about Keshab. Pratap says, "Keshab's dispassion[1] was evident even in childhood. He was seldom seen having fun and playing with other boys. He was a student in the

1. Vairagya: nonattachment to the world.

Hindu College, where he became a great friend of Satyendra. Through him, he came in contact with Devendranath Tagore. Keshab had yoga as well as love and devotion. At times, due to excessive love, he would become semiconscious. The main goal of his life was to bring religion to family life."

Ego and fame – 'I the doer,' 'I the guru' – signs of God-realization

The conversation turns to a lady from Maharashtra.

Pratap: "Some women of this province have gone to the West. One such lady from Maharashtra was very learned. She went there, but she has embraced Christianity. Sir, have you heard about her?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, but from what you say, she seems to have had a desire for name and fame. Egotism of this kind is not good. The idea 'I am the doer,' comes from ignorance. 'Oh Lord, You are the doer' – this is knowledge. The Lord alone is the doer and all others are non-doers. You bring upon yourself such trouble if you say, 'I, I.' You can understand if you consider the state of a calf. The calf bellows, 'Hamma, hamma,' that is, 'I, I.' See what troubles befall it! Perhaps it is yoked to a plough from morning till evening, in sun or rain alike. Or perhaps a butcher kills it for people to eat. And then its skin might be tanned into hide. This hide will be used to make shoes and other things. People will put their feet into them to walk. Even then its troubles don't end. From its skin a drum is made and then beaten constantly with a stick. In the end, its intestines are used to make strings for the bow of a cotton carder. Then it makes the

sound, 'Tuhum, tuhum,' (Thou, Thou). Then it no longer says, 'Hamma, hamma.' Only saying 'Tuhum, tuhum' releases, brings liberation. Then it doesn't have to return to the field of activity.

"Similarly, when an embodied soul says, 'O Lord, I am not the doer, You are the Doer; I am an instrument, You are the Being who uses the instrument,' his trials and tribulations in the world cease. Only then is the embodied soul liberated; it doesn't have to return to this field of activity."

Devotee: "How can an embodied soul get rid of his ego?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It disappears only when one has realized God. When a person is rid of his ego, he surely has had a vision of God."

Devotee: "Sir, how can you know if a person has seen God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are signs of God-vision. According to the Srimad Bhagavata, there are four signs of God-vision. One becomes like a child, like an unclean spirit,[1] like an insentient being, or like a madman.

"A person who has seen God develops the temperament of a child. He goes beyond the three gunas.[2] He does not become bound by any of them. He seems to make no distinction between purity and impurity – thus he is like an unclean spirit. And then like a madman he sometimes laughs, sometimes weeps. At one time he may dress himself

1. Pishacha.
2. The three qualities of sattva, rajas, and tamas.

like a gentleman, but soon after he may strip himself naked and begin to wander around with his dhoti under his arm. He seems to act like a mad man. Than again he may sit quietly at one place like an insentient being – an inert, lifeless, material body."

Devotee: "Does one get rid of the ego totally after the vision of God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Sometimes God completely erases one's ego, as in the state of samadhi. But generally the person retains a trace of ego. There is no harm in this ego. It's like the ego of a child. A five-year-old child says, 'I, I,' but that ego doesn't harm anybody.

"Iron becomes gold by touching the philosopher's stone. An iron sword becomes a sword of gold. It keeps the shape of a sword, but can't hurt anybody. You can't cut or kill with a sword made of gold."

Chapter Six

Worship of 'gold' in the West — is work or God-realization the aim of life?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): "You went to England. What did you see there? Do tell me about it."

Pratap: "In the West people are worshipers of what you call 'gold.' Generally speaking, from one end to the other, activity[1] reigns supreme there – it is the same in America. Still, there are some good people, some who are unattached to worldly life."

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1. Rajas.

The West and Karma Yoga – Karma Yoga or Bhakti Yoga, which one for the Kaliyuga?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): "It is not true that attachment to worldly work is only found in the West. It's all over the world. And do you know why? Work is a sign of the first stage of life. God cannot be realized without devotion, discrimination, dispassion, kindness, and the like.[1] The very nature of work[2] involves a person in worldly activities, so it brings a darkness[3] with it. Too much work makes one forget God and leads to greater attachment to 'lust and greed.'

"However, it is not possible to give up work all of a sudden. Your nature will lead you to do it, whether you want to or not. So the instruction is: work without attachment. Work done without attachment means work done without any expectation of reward. For example, you may take to worship, repeating the name of God,[4] and religious austerities, but not for recognition or for earning merit.

"Working unattached in this way is called Karma Yoga. But it is very difficult. In the Kaliyuga attachment creeps in so easily. You may resolve to work without attachment, but attachment enters from somewhere, you don't know from where. Say you have celebrated a big holy feast or served a number of paupers. You may have thought, I am doing all this without any

1. Sattvaguna.
2. Rajoguna.
3. Tamoguna.
4. Japa.

attachment; yet the desire for name and fame enters from somewhere unseen. Thus, it is only possible for those who have seen God to be completely unattached."

Devotee: "What is the way for those who have not seen God? Should they renounce all worldly work?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "For the Kaliyuga, Bhakti Yoga is best suited – the path of love and devotion enjoined by Narada: chanting the name and glories of God and praying with a longing heart, 'O Lord, grant me knowledge and devotion, reveal Yourself to me.' Karma Yoga is very difficult. That's why you must pray to God, 'O Lord, lessen my work. And whatever the work you have for me, may I, by Your grace, be able to perform it without attachment. Besides that, grant that I may have no desire to engage myself in more work.'

"It is not possible to give up work. To meditate – that, too, is work. When you have gained love for God, your worldly work decreases by itself. And then you don't like it anymore. Who likes water sweetened with molasses after having tasted water sweetened with sugar candy?"

A devotee: "Westerners urge us to work more and more. Is work the aim of life?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The aim of life is to realize God. Work is only the first chapter of human life. It can't be the aim of life. Even selfless work[1] is only a means, not the end.

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1. Nishkama karma.

"Sambhu said, 'Please bless me that the money I have may be spent on good causes – in building hospitals, dispensaries, roads, wells, and so on.' I said, 'It's good to do all this work unattached, but it is very difficult. You must always remember, in whatever you do, that the aim of human life is to attain God, not to build hospitals and dispensaries. Suppose God appears before you and tells you to ask for a boon. Will you ask Him to build some hospitals and dispensaries for you? Or will you say to Him, "O Lord, grant me pure love at your lotus feet. May I see You always." Hospitals, dispensaries, and so on are all transient things. God is the only Reality; all else is unreal. When He is attained, one realizes that He alone is the doer and that we do nothing. Why should we forget Him and destroy ourselves with so much work? When He is attained, hospitals and dispensaries may be built if He so wills. I say that work is only the first chapter of human life; it is not the end of life. Take to spiritual practice and go forward. As you practice and advance further, you will come to know in the end that God is the only Reality and all else is unreal – and that the aim of life, truly, is to realize God.

"A woodcutter went to the forest to cut wood. There he happened to meet a brahmachari.[1] The brahmachari said to him, 'My good man, go forward.' On returning home, the woodcutter began

1. A brahmachari is a spiritual aspirant practising control over the mind and preparing for the next step of life – that of the householder, or the ascetic.

to wonder why the brahmachari had asked him to go forward.

"Some days passed. One day he was reminded of the words of the brahmachari. He said to himself, 'Today I will go forward.' As he went deep into the forest, he found numberless sandalwood trees. Full of joy, he brought some sandalwood back. Selling it in the market, he became very rich.

"In this way some days passed, when he was again reminded of the words of the brahmachari, 'Go forward.' Now, as he went farther into the forest, he found a mine of silver near the bank of a river. This he could never have dreamt. He mined the silver and sold it. He made so much money that he became a very wealthy man.

"Some more days passed. One day he again said to himself, 'The brahmachari didn't ask me to go only up to the silver mine. He asked me to go forward.' This time he crossed the river and saw a gold mine. He then said to himself, 'Nice indeed! That is why the brahmachari asked me to go forward.'

"After a few days, he again went farther and lo! he found heaps of diamonds and jewels lying on the ground. Now he became as rich as the god of wealth himself.[1]

"So I say, whatever you may be doing, if you go forward, you will find something better. If you receive inspiration after reaching a particular stage, don't think that you have come to the end. Work is not the goal of life. Go forward and you will

1. Kubera.

be able to work selflessly. But selfless work is very difficult. So pray to God with a longing heart, 'Oh Lord, grant me love and devotion at Your lotus feet and reduce my work. Whatever work you give me to do, grant that I may be able to do it selflessly.'

"If you go further, you will find God. You will have His vision. And gradually you will talk intimately with Him."

The conversation now turns to the dispute about preaching in the temple of the Brahmo Samaj after the demise of Keshab.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): "I hear that there has been some controversy with you over the pulpit. The ones who started this dispute are insignificant people.[1] (*All laugh*.)

(*To the devotees*) "You see, people like Pratap, Amrita, and some others "blow the conch shell" (make a loud noise). And others produce no sound at all."

Pratap: "Sir, so far as musical sound is concerned, even a mango stone gives sound!"

1. Sri Ramakrishna said "Hare, Pela, and Pancha," which means people of ordinary calibre. The English equivalent would be "Tom, Dick, and Harry."

Chapter Seven

Brahmo Samaj and Sri Ramakrishna – instruction to Pratap

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): "Listen, hearing the lectures of your Brahmo Samaj preachers, one can very well understand the inner feeling[1] of the people there. Once they took me to a meeting at the Hari Sabha.[2] The preacher was a pundit named Samadhyayi. He said, 'The Lord has no sweetness.[3] We have to make Him juicy[4] with our loving devotion.' I was flabbergasted to hear this and was reminded of a story. Once a boy said that his maternal uncle had a cowshed full of horses at his home. No horse is kept in a cowshed! Only cows are kept there! Hearing such absurdity, what can one conclude? Just this: that there are no horses or anything else there!" (*All laugh.*)

A devotee: "Not just that there are no horses there; there is not even a cow! (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: "Look, He who is the fountain of love and bliss[5] was said by that man to be totally devoid of sweetness.[6] It only shows that he has never experienced what God is."

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1. Bhava.
2. A meeting hall for religious talks and study of the scriptures.
3. Rasa.
4. Saras.
5. Rasa-swarup.
6. Neeras.

'I am the doer,' 'this is my house' – all this is ignorance – 'diving deep' is the aim of life

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): "Listen, I tell you, you are well read, intelligent, and serious-minded. You and Keshab were two brothers, like Gaur and Nitai. You have had enough lecturing, discussions, quarrels, and disputes. Are you interested in these things anymore? Gather your whole mind and concentrate it on God. Just jump into God."

Pratap: "Yes sir, there is no doubt about that. This clearly is my duty now. But I am doing all this to preserve Keshab's name."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "You say you're doing all this to keep his name alive. But after some time this spirit will not last. Listen to a story.

"A person had his house on the top of a hill. It was a small, thatched house. He had laboured hard to build it. After a few days there was a terrible storm. The house began to shake. The man became very worried as to how to save it. He said, 'O, Pavana Deva (the god of wind), please don't destroy my house!' But the god of wind turned a deaf ear to his words. The house began to shake violently. Then he remembered that Hanuman was the son of Pavana Deva. As soon as this thought entered his mind, he cried out, 'O Father, don't destroy this house. It is Hanuman's house! I beseech you!' But the house still shook. Who would listen to him? When he repeated 'Hanuman's house, Hanuman's house' so many times and nothing happened, he began to say, 'Father, it is Lakshmana's house, it is the house of Lakshmana!' This too carried no weight. Then he began to call out, 'Father, it is

Rama's house, it is Rama's! I say Father, don't wreck it! I beseech you!' Even now nothing happened. The house began to collapse. The question now was how to save his own life. Running out of the house, the man cried, 'It is the devil's own house!'

(*To Pratap*) "You don't have to save Keshab's name. Know that everything happens by the will of God. It was there by God's will and it is coming to an end by His will. What can you do? Now your duty is simply to give your whole mind to God, to dive deep into His ocean of love."

Saying this, Thakur begins to sing a song in his uniquely sweet voice:

> Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty, and to the deepest depths descend: there you will find the gem of Love.
>
> Go seek, go seek, O mind, the blessed Vrindavan within your heart, the abode of the Lord of Love.
>
> Then in your heart the unceasing light of knowledge will ever shine.
>
> Who is it that steers your boat over solid ground? It is your guru, says Kabir. Listen, and meditate on his holy feet.

(*To Pratap*) "Did you listen to the song? Enough of lectures and quarrels. Now dive deep. Diving into this sea, there is no fear of death. It is the sea of immortality. Don't think that it will make you lose your head. Don't think that a person becomes mad by calling longingly on God. I said this to Narendra."

Pratap: "Who is Narendra?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Oh, he's a young man. I said to him, 'Look here, God is the sea of nectar.[1] Don't you want to dive into that sea? Just imagine a bowl of nectar, and you are a fly. Where will you sit to drink the nectar?' Narendra said, 'I will sit on the edge of the bowl and sip by leaning over it.' I asked, 'Why? Why sit on the edge?' He said, 'If I go farther, I'll be drowned and lose my life.' Then I said, 'My boy, there is no such danger in the sea of Sat-chit-ananda. It is the sea of immortality. By diving into this sea, nobody dies, but instead becomes immortal. One does not lose one's head by being mad for God.'

(*To the devotees*) "'I and mine': this is ignorance. Rasmani built the Kali Temple – everybody says this. Nobody says that God built it. So-and-so founded the Brahmo Samaj – everybody says so. Nobody says that it came into being only by the will of God. 'I am the doer': this is ignorance. 'O Lord, You are the doer, I do nothing; You are the operator, I am the machine': this is knowledge. 'O Lord, nothing is mine. This temple is not mine, the Kali Temple is not mine, the Samaj is not mine – these are all Yours. Wife, son, family – none of these is mine – they are all Yours': this is knowledge.

"People say, 'This is mine, it belongs to me.' Loving all such objects as your own is maya. But loving all things is compassion.[2] 'I love only the members of the Brahmo Samaj,' or 'I love only my family': this is maya. To love only your compatriots

1. Rasa: liquid sweet.
2. Daya.

is maya. To love people of all countries, to love followers of all religions, comes from love of God, from compassion.

"Maya binds man. It takes one away from God. Compassion leads one towards Him. Sukadeva and Narada both had compassion."

Chapter Eight

Instructions to Pratap – Brahmo Samaj and 'lust and greed'

Pratap: "Sir, those who come to you, are they making progress gradually?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You know, there's no harm in leading a family life. But you have to live in the family like a maidservant."

Spiritual practice in the family

"A maidservant refers to her master's house as 'our house,' though she has her own home in another village. Seeing her master's house, she says, 'our house,' but in her mind she knows that this house is not hers and that her own home is in the village. Again she rears her master's son and says, 'My Hari has become very naughty. My Hari doesn't like sweets.' Though she says, 'my Hari,' she knows that Hari is not hers, that he is her master's son.

"Therefore, I say to those who come here, 'Why not live a family life? There is no harm in it. But fix your mind in God while living a householder's life. Know that the house and family are not yours. They are all God's. 'My real home is with God.' And

I also say to them, 'Pray earnestly for love and devotion at His lotus feet.'"

The conversation again turns to foreign countries. A devotee says, "Sir, these days learned men of the West don't accept even the existence of God."

Pratap: "They may be saying that but I don't think any of them is an atheist at heart. Many have admitted that there is some Supreme Power behind the affairs of the world."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's enough if they believe in Power.[1] How are they atheists then?"

Pratap: "Besides, Western scholars also believe in a moral government (which rewards good actions and punishes evil ones)."

After a long conversation, Pratap rises to leave.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Pratap*): "What more can I tell you? I only ask that you not involve yourself in quarrels and controversies.

"And one thing more – it is 'lust and greed' that take a man away from God. They are obstacles to God-realization. Everybody praises his own wife, whether or not she is good. (*All laugh*.) Whether one's wife is good or not, if you ask what kind of a wife he has, a man will immediately say, 'Sir, she is good indeed.'"

Pratap: "May I leave now?"

Pratap leaves. Thakur's sweet words about renunciation of 'lust and gold' have not ended. The

1. Shakti.

leaves of the trees in Surendra's garden are fluttering and murmuring in the southern breeze. All these words mix in their sound, but as they float into the infinite sky, they have struck the hearts of the devotees.

But have these words resounded in Pratap's heart?

After some time Manilal Mallick says to Thakur, "Sir, you must now depart for Dakshineswar. Keshab Sen's mother and other ladies of the house are going there to have your darshan. Not finding you there, they may be disappointed and leave."

Keshab had departed from this mortal world many months ago. His venerable mother, wife, and other ladies of his household are going to visit Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani Mallick*): "Wait a little, brother. I haven't had my nap. Besides, I can't do anything in a hurry. If they have gone there, what can I do about it? They will have a nice stroll in the garden and enjoy it."

After a little rest Thakur is ready to leave for Dakshineswar, but before leaving he prays for the welfare of Surendra. He visits all the rooms, one by one, softly repeating the name of God. He doesn't want to leave anything unfinished. Standing there, he says, "I didn't eat luchis[1] before. Bring me a little now."

He takes a small piece of luchi, eats it and then says, "This means something. If I remembered that

1. Fried bread.

I had not eaten the luchi, I would want to come back for it."

Mani Mallick: "That would have been nice! We, too, could have come with you!"

All the devotees laugh.

Section XI

Sri Ramakrishna's Meeting with a Pundit

Chapter One

Visit to Ishan's House

Today is the Car Festival,[1] Wednesday, 25 June 1884, the second day of the bright fortnight of Ashada. At Ishan's invitation, Sri Ramakrishna has arrived this morning at his house in the Thanthania district of Calcutta. Upon arrival Thakur has come to know that Pundit Shashadhar is staying nearby with the Chatterjis on College Street. He is very keen to meet the pundit, so it is decided that he will go to see him in the evening.

It is now about ten o'clock in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting with devotees in Ishan's ground floor parlour with some brahmins from Bhattapada, one of them a Bhagavata pundit. Hazra and two devotees have come with Thakur. Ishan's sons, one of them Shrish, and a devotee who worships Shakti and wears a vermilion mark on his forehead are also there. Thakur has a sense of humor. Seeing the vermilion mark, he laughs and says, "He is branded!"

After a while Narendra and M. arrive from their Calcutta homes. After saluting Thakur, they sit beside him. Thakur had told M. previously, "I'll be going to Ishan's house on a certain date. You go too, and bring Narendra with you."

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1. Ratha Yatra.

Thakur says to M., "The other day I wanted to go to visit your house. Where do you live?"

M.: "Sir, now I live at Telipada in Shyampukur, near the school."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Didn't you go to school today?"

M.: "Sir, today the school is closed for the Car Festival."

Since the death of Narendra's father, there have been great problems in his family. Narendra is the eldest of several brothers and sisters. His father had been a lawyer but had not saved anything. Narendra is looking for a job to meet the family's expenses. Thakur has asked Ishan and some other devotees to find him a job. Ishan is a superintendent in the Comptroller General's office. Thakur worries whenever he hears of Narendra's family problems.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "I have spoken to Ishan about you. He was at the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar one day. I spoke to him then. He knows many people."

In addition to Thakur, Ishan has invited many friends for the occasion. Songs will be sung to the accompaniment of banya,[1] tabla, and tanpura,[2] and one member of the family has brought very fine flour for the pakhavaj.[3] At about eleven, Ishan asks Narendra to sing.

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1. A semi-circular instrument.
2. A stringed musical instrument.
3. A barrel-shaped drum with membranes placed over each end; the left end is the bass and it is smeared with varying amounts of moist

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "Just fine flour! Then it will be quite some time until our meal is ready."

Ishan: "No sir, it won't take too long."

Some of the devotees laugh. A scholar well versed in the Bhagavata laughs as he recites an uncommon couplet, not written in any book.[1] After reciting the couplet, he explains it:

"Poetry is more pleasing than philosophy. When poetry is recited or heard, schools of philosophy such as Vedanta, Samkhya, Nyaya, and Patanjala all seem dry. But music is more attractive than poetry. Even a heart made of stone melts on hearing music. Then again, if a beautiful woman passes by, the poetry is forgotten and the song loses its flavour. The whole mind goes to that woman. But when you're hungry and craving food, then you want neither poetry nor song nor woman. The thought of food is all-consuming!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He is witty indeed."

When the pakhavaj is tuned, Narendra begins to sing, and Thakur goes upstairs to the drawing room overlooking the road for a rest. M. and Shrish accompany him. Kshetra Nath Chatterji, Ishan's father-in-law, built the room.

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flour, dough, to vary the pitch. It has a strap that goes around the neck of the drummer to hold it while standing.

1. *Kavyam darshanam hanti, kavyen giten hanyate,*
Gitancha istrivilasen, sarve hanti bubhukshuta.
Upon obtaining this couplet it was later included in the footnote.

M. introduces Shrish, saying, "He is a learned man, very serene in temperament. He's been my classmate since childhood. He's a lawyer now."

Sri Ramakrishna: "For such a person to be a lawyer!"

M.: "He took up the profession by mistake."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I know a lawyer named Ganesh. Sometimes he comes to the Dakshineswar Kali Temple with some other gentlemen. Panna also comes. He's not handsome, but he sings well. He has great regard for me. He is a simple-hearted man.

(*To Shrish*) "What do you think is the essence of life?"

Shrish: "God exists and He alone does everything. Even so, what we conceive of His attributes isn't right. How can a man conceive of Him? He's infinite!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "How many trees are in a garden and how many branches each tree has – what is the use of such calculation? You've come to the garden to eat mangoes. Eat them and leave. It's only to attain love and devotion to God that you've taken birth as a human being. Eat the mangoes and be satisfied.

"You've come to drink wine. What is the use in knowing how many maunds[1] of wine are in the wine shop? Just a tumbler-full is enough for you.

1. An Indian measurement of weight.

"What is the need for you to know His infinite affairs?

"If you look for His attributes for millions of years, you will still not be able to know even a fraction of them."

Thakur is silent for a while and then he resumes talking. A brahmin from Bhattapada is also there.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "There is nothing in worldly life. As things go, Ishan's is better than most. If his family had not been good, if the boys had been womanizers, drug-addicts, drunkards, or disobedient, there would have been no end to his troubles. In his family everyone's mind is turned towards God. It's a truly religious household. It is rare. I have seen very few homes such as this. Usually there are endless misunderstandings, quarrels, and jealousy. Besides, there are disease, sorrow, and poverty. Seeing this, I said, 'Mother, please turn my mind from the world.' Just see what problems Narendra is facing! His father is dead, the members of his family don't have food to eat, a job is so difficult to find. He's trying hard, but he can't find one. Just see how he is wandering around!

"M., you used to come to Dakshineswar so often. Why have your visits become so few? Maybe you've gotten too attached to your family. Is that why?

"This isn't anybody's fault. Everywhere there is 'lust and greed.' That's why I pray, 'Mother, if I ever have to take a human body again, don't make me a worldly man!' "

The brahmin from Bhattapada: "But sir, household life has been praised in the holy books."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, but it is very difficult."

Thakur changes the subject of conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "How wrong of us! They are singing – Narendra is singing – and we've all left the room."

Chapter Two

Bhakti Yoga, not Karma Yoga, is for the Kaliyuga

At about four o'clock, Thakur gets into the carriage. He is very delicate, so his body must be treated very carefully. It is difficult for him to walk on the road; he cannot walk even a short distance. When he gets into the carriage, he is absorbed in bhava samadhi. It is the rainy season and is drizzling. The sky is overcast and the road is muddy. The devotees walk behind the carriage. Being the day of the Car Festival, children are blowing horns made from palm leaves.

The carriage stops at the entrance to the house Shashadhar is visiting. Thakur is warmly received by the host and his relatives.

A staircase leads up to the drawing room. As he goes up, Sri Ramakrishna sees Shashadhar coming to welcome him. The pundit appears to be middle-aged. His complexion is fair and shining and he wears a rosary of rudraksha beads around his neck. Humbly and with great reverence, he salutes Thakur and leads him to the drawing room. Devotees follow and take their seats.

Everyone is keen to sit near Sri Ramakrishna and to listen to the nectar of his words. Narendra, Rakhal, Ram, M., and many other devotees are present. Hazra has also come with him from the Dakshineswar Kali Temple.

Looking at the pundit, Thakur goes into a semiconscious state. After a while, in the same state, he smiles at the pundit and says, "Very well, very well!" He adds, "What kind of lectures do you give?"

Shashadhar: "Sir, I try to explain the teachings of the scriptures."

Sri Ramakrishna: "For the Kaliyuga the path of love and devotion as preached by Narada is enjoined. Where is the time to perform all those rituals mentioned in the scriptures? These days the decoction of ten medicinal roots[1] does not help cure a fever. By the time such a decoction begins to show effect, the patient runs the risk of being carried off. 'Fever mixture' is the medicine for the present age. If you ask them to perform rituals, give them fish minus the head and tail. I tell people that they don't have to perform the sandhya[2] and other such elaborate acts. Recitation of the Gayatri[3] is enough. If you have to talk of rituals at all, do so only to a few, like Ishan."

Lecture to worldly men

"You may lecture a thousand times, and you'll not be able to change worldly men. Can one drive a nail into a stone wall? The nail is what will bend. The wall will remain as it is. What can the blow of a sword do to a crocodile? The bitter gourd water

1. Dashamul pachan, a traditional Hindu prescription.
2. Divine service three times a day.
3. A short text from the Vedas, the repetition of which leads to meditation on God.

pot[1] of a wandering monk goes to the four principle places of pilgrimage in India,[2] yet it remains as bitter as before. Your lectures to worldly men are not helping very much. You will understand this gradually. A calf can't stand all at once. It falls to the ground and then stands up again. That is how it learns to stand up and walk."

First love[3] and then reasoning – karma falls off with God-realization – yoga and samadhi

"You cannot distinguish a devotee from a worldly person. That isn't your fault. During the first burst of a storm, it is not possible to distinguish a tamarind tree from a mango tree.

"Before God-realization one cannot suddenly give up performance of rituals. How long, then, does one have to perform sandhya and such ritualistic worship? As long as tears do not flow and the hair does not stand on end at the sound of God's name. If tears fill the eyes even once when saying 'Om Rama,' know for certain that your karmas are over. You will not have to perform sandhya and other rituals any more.

"The blossom falls off as soon as the fruit appears. Karma is the blossom, and love for God is the fruit. The daughter-in-law of the house can't work much when she's pregnant; her mother-in-law gradually frees her from work. During the last month she barely lets her work at all. When the infant is born, the mother only attends to it and not

1. Kamandalu.
2. Dhams.
3. Nava-anuraga.

to any other work. The sandhya merges into Gayatri and then Gayatri into Om. Om then becomes merged in samadhi – as the sound of a bell 't-o-m.' Following the trail of the sound 'Om,' the yogi becomes lost in the Supreme Brahman.[1] Sandhya and such karmas disappear in samadhi. In this way the duties of the jnani fall off."

Chapter Three

Mere learning is of no use – spiritual practice, discrimination, and dispassion

While talking of samadhi, Sri Ramakrishna goes into an ecstatic mood. A divine light begins to shine from his beautiful face. He has no external consciousness. Not a sound comes from his mouth and his eyes are fixed. Surely he is having a vision of the Lord of the Universe. After a long time he returns to normal consciousness. Like a child, he says, "I'll have some water." Whenever he asks for water after samadhi, the devotees know that he is gradually returning to normal consciousness.

Still in ecstasy Thakur says to the Divine Mother, "Mother, the other day you showed me Ishwar Vidyasagar. After that I said, 'Mother, I want to see another pundit.' That is why You have brought me here."

Glancing at Shashadhar, he says, "Son, gain a little more power. Practice spiritual disciplines for some time more. You have barely started climbing

1. Parabrahman.

the tree before you wish for a bunch of fruit. Of course you do all this for the benefit of others."

Saying this, Thakur salutes Shashadhar by bowing his head.

And he adds, "When I heard about you for the first time, I asked whether this pundit is just a learned man, or if he also has discrimination and non-attachment."

One cannot become a religious teacher without receiving a commission from God

"A pundit without discrimination is no pundit at all.

"If one has received a commission from God, it is all right to teach others. When a person teaches after getting a commission, nobody can confound him.

"Getting only a single ray from the goddess of learning (Saraswati), one attains such strength that even the most learned become like earthworms before him.

"When you light a lamp, swarms of moths come to it by themselves: they don't have to be called. Similarly, one who has received a commission from God doesn't have to invite people by announcing that a lecture will be delivered at a certain time. No message needs to be sent. He has such attraction that people flock to him of their own accord. Then princes and gentlemen come in swarms. And they ask again and again, 'What would you like? I have brought mangoes, sandesh (a Bengali sweet), money, a shawl, and so on. Will you accept them?' I

tell all those people, 'Keep them. I don't care for those things. I don't want anything.'

"Does a magnet invite iron by saying, 'Come near?' It doesn't have to say that; the iron rushes to the magnet because of the magnet's attraction.

"Such a man may not be a pundit, but don't think that he lacks knowledge. Can you acquire knowledge by just reading books? The knowledge of a person who has received a commission from God is inexhaustible. This knowledge flows from God and is never-ending.

"In the countryside, one person weighs paddy while another pushes heap after heap toward him. It's the same thing with the person who has received a commission from God. The Divine Mother keeps on pushing heaps of knowledge toward him from behind. This knowledge never comes to an end. If the Divine Mother but once casts a glance, can there remain any lack of knowledge? That's why I ask whether or not you have received a commission."

Hazra: "Yes, surely he's received a commission. Haven't you, sir?"

The pundit: "No, I haven't received such a commission."

The host: "He may not have received a commission, but he lectures out of a sense of duty."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What will his lectures achieve if he has no commission from God?

"Once a Brahmo preacher said in his lecture, 'Brothers, I used to drink so much liquor! I used to

do this, and I used to do that.' Hearing it, people began to whisper among themselves, 'What is this rascal saying? He used to drink liquor?' His words caused confusion in the audience. A lecture benefits no one if the speaker lacks a good character.

"A high government official[1] from Barisal said, 'Sir, you begin to preach and I will get ready.' I said, 'Brother, listen to a story. In the countryside,[2] there is a pond known as Haldarpukur. People used to defecate on its bank. In the morning people coming to the pond would shout abuses in plenty, but to no avail. The very next morning they would see the bank littered with faeces again. After some days the municipality sent a worker who placed a notice near the pond. What a wonder! The defecation on the banks stopped immediately!

"So I say, a lecture by a worthless person is of no use. When you have the badge of authority, then alone will people listen to you. Unless you receive God's commission, you can't teach others. He who is going to preach must have sufficient spiritual power. In Calcutta there are so many wrestlers like Hanumanpuri. You have to wrestle with them. These people (the congregation) are mere sheep!

"Chaitanya Deva was an incarnation of God. What is left of the work that even he did, just tell me! What good can come out of lectures by those who have not received a commission from God?"

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1. Sub-judge.
2. Kamarpukur village, where Sri Ramakrishna was born and brought up.

How does one receive a commission?

Sri Ramakrishna: "So I say, become absorbed at God's lotus feet."

Saying this and intoxicated with the wine of divine love, Thakur begins to sing:

> Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty, and to the deepest depths descend: there you will find the gem of Love.

"By drowning in this sea, one does not die. It is the ocean of immortality."

Instruction to Narendra – God is the ocean of immortality

"I said to Narendra, 'God is an ocean of nectar. Tell me if you will dive into it. Imagine a cup full of sugar syrup and you're a fly. Where will you perch to drink the syrup?' Narendra said, 'I'll sit on the edge of the bowl and stretch my neck to sip from there. If I were to go farther, I would drown.' Then I said, 'My son, this is the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda. There's no fear of death in it. It's the ocean of immortality.' Only ignorant people say you shouldn't overdo your love and devotion for God. Is there any limit to love for God? So I say to you, immerse yourself in the sea of Sat-chit-ananda.

"What worry can there be when you have realized God? Then you will not only receive His commission, but also teach mankind."

Chapter Four

Countless paths for God-realization – Bhakti Yoga is the path for this age

Sri Ramakrishna: "Look here, there are numberless paths to reach the ocean of immortality. Any path you take, it is enough if you can jump into this ocean. Imagine a reservoir of the nectar of immortality. If only a small drop of it somehow falls into your mouth, you become immortal. Whether you jump into it or go into it slowly by a staircase and take a drop of it from there, or if you are pushed into it, the result will be the same. You will become immortal by just tasting a drop of this nectar.

"There are innumerable paths. Among them are the path of knowledge, the path of action, and the path of love and devotion. You will attain God by any path if you have sincere longing for Him.

"There are three kinds of yogas: the yoga of knowledge, the yoga of action and the yoga of love and devotion.

"Jnana Yoga. In the path of knowledge the jnani wants to know Brahman, the Absolute. He says to himself, 'Not this, not this.' He reasons, 'Only Brahman is real and the world unreal.' He meditates on what is real and what is unreal. When his reasoning stops, he goes into samadhi and he gains the knowledge of the Absolute.

"Karma Yoga. The path of action is to keep the mind in God by doing work – this is what you are

teaching. It is the practice of breath control,[1] meditation,[2] and concentration without attachment to results. If householders attend to their duties in life in an unattached manner with devotion for Him and surrender the result of their work to Him, it, too, is Karma Yoga. To perform worship, repetition of God's name, and other such actions, surrendering the result to God, is also the path of action. The goal of this path is also God-realization.

"Bhakti Yoga. The path of devotion, Bhakti Yoga, is in fixing the mind on God by repeating His name and singing His glories. Bhakti Yoga is the easy path for the Kaliyuga. It is indeed the path for the present age.

"Karma Yoga. The path of action is very difficult. In the first place, as I told you earlier, you do not have the time for it these days. Where is the time to perform all the rituals enjoined in the scriptures? Life is short in the Kaliyuga And then it is extremely difficult to work without expectation of reward, to work unattached. One cannot be truly detached without having first realized God. Attachment to results come, one knows not from where.

"The path of knowledge is also very difficult in this age. In the first place, human life is dependent on food. Second, life is short. Third, it is not possible to rid oneself of body consciousness. Spiritual knowledge is impossible without freedom from body-consciousness. The follower of the path of

1. Pranayama.
2. Dhyana.

knowledge says, 'I am Brahman; I am not this body, I am beyond hunger, thirst, disease, grief, birth, death, pleasure, pain, and the like.' If you are aware of disease, grief, pleasure, pain, then how can you be a man of knowledge? When your hand is torn by thorns, you bleed profusely and suffer pain; yet you say, 'No, my hand is not scratched and torn. Nothing has happened to me.'"

The paths of knowledge and action are not the religion of this age

"That is why, for this age, the path of love and devotion is best. One can approach God more easily through it than by any other path. One can reach God by way of knowledge or action and by other paths too, but all these are very difficult.

"Bhakti Yoga is the religion for this age. This does not mean that a lover of God reaches one goal and the followers of the path of knowledge and action reach another. It means that those who want the knowledge of the Absolute will attain it, even if they adopt and tread the path of love and devotion. Remember that the gracious loving Lord of the devotees[1] grants the knowledge of Brahman if He so wishes."

Does a devotee attain knowledge of the Absolute? How does he perform actions and prayer?

"The devotee wants to see God with form. He wants to talk to Him. Usually he doesn't want the knowledge of the Absolute. Even so, God's will is the law. If He wills, He can bestow on the devotee

1. Bhakta-vatsala.

all spiritual wealth. He gives not only love and devotion, but divine knowledge as well. If one can get to Calcutta, one can also see Fort Maidan, the Asiatic Society's Museum – everything.

"Now the question is how to reach Calcutta.

"If you reach the Mother of the Universe, you will get love and devotion as well as spiritual knowledge. In bhava samadhi,[1] you see God with form; in nirvikalpa samadhi, you see akhanda Sat-chit-ananda (indivisible, absolute Existence-Knowledge-Bliss). Then your 'I-ness' – name and form – do not exist.

"The devotee says, 'Mother, I am afraid of performing work with a motive. In such work there is desire, and the action will yield some fruit. It is very difficult to work with detachment. By doing work with motive, I will forget You. Therefore, I do not want to do it. Until I attain You, may my work decrease. What little I have to do, may I do without attachment, and may I gain greater love and devotion for You. Until I attain You, may my mind not engage itself in any new work. I shall work only when You command me; otherwise not.'"

1. A kind of ecstasy attained by following the path of love and devotion for God.

Chapter Five

Pilgrimage and Sri Ramakrishna – three classes of religious teachers

The pundit: "Sir, how far did you go on your pilgrimage?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "I saw a few places. Hazra went farther and higher; he went to Hrishikesh. (*All laugh.*) I didn't go that far, or that high. Kites and vultures soar very high, but their eyes remain fixed on the charnel pits where carcasses of dead animals are thrown. (*All laugh.*) Do you know what I mean by charnel pits? 'Lust and greed.'

"If you can cultivate love and devotion for God sitting here, what is the need to go on pilgrimage? When I went to Kashi, I saw that the trees were the same, the tamarind leaves were also the same.

"If you do not develop love for God at places of pilgrimage, your visit to those places has been of no use. Love for God alone is the essential thing, the only thing needed. Do you know what I mean by kites and vultures? Many people come here and they talk big and say, 'We have performed many of the rites and duties enjoined by the holy books.' But their minds remain attached to the world. They are busy with money, name and honour, comfort, and so on."

The pundit: "Yes, sir. Going on pilgrimage is like searching for diamonds and jewels while throwing away Vishnu's own gem."[1]

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1. Kaustubhmani.

Sri Ramakrishna: "And you must also know that, though you may preach a thousand things, they will be of no use unless it is the right time. When going to bed, a child says to his mother, 'Mother, please wake me up when I have to go to the bathroom.' The mother replies, 'Child, its pressure itself will wake you up. You don't have to worry about that.' (*Laughter*.)

"Similarly, longing for God comes in its own time."

Preach only to the competent – is God merciful?

"There are three classes of physicians.

"One class feels the pulse of the patient, prescribes medicine for him, and leaves him, saying, 'Take this medicine.' Such physicians are the lowest class. Similarly, some religious teachers give instructions, but they don't check to see whether or not their teachings have done any good. They don't bother to find out.

"Another class of physician arranges for the medicine and asks the patient to take it. If the patient does not want to take it, they reason with him in many ways. These are physicians of the mediocre class. Likewise, there are mediocre-class religious teachers. They preach and also explain to people in many ways so that their advice is followed.

"And then there is the highest class of physician. If gentle persuasion fails to make the patient understand, such physicians even use force. If need be, they put their knees on the patient's

chest and force the medicine down his throat. In the same way, there is a highest class of religious teacher. Such teachers also use force to direct their disciples to God."

The pundit: "Sir, if there are religious teachers of the highest class, why do you say that one doesn't gain knowledge till the right time?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's right. But think: if the medicine doesn't reach the stomach, if it is vomited, what can the physician do? Then even the physician of the highest class is helpless.

"You should instruct only after judging the listener. You people instruct without having examined the receptacle. When a boy comes to me, I ask him about his family. Suppose his father is dead and he has left some debts. How can the boy give his mind to God? Do you hear what I am saying, brother?"

The pundit: "Yes sir, I am listening to everything."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Once a group of Sikh soldiers came to the temple at Dakshineswar. I met them in front of Mother Kali's shrine. One of them said, 'God is very kind.' I said, 'Are you sure? How do you know?' He said, 'Why Maharaj, God gives us food. He cares so much for us!' I said, 'What is that to wonder at? God is the father of all. If a father doesn't look after his son, who else will? Will people of the neighbourhood do it?'"

Narendra: "So shouldn't God be called merciful?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Am I stopping you from calling Him merciful? What I mean is that God is our own. He's not a stranger."

Pundit: "Precious words!"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "I was listening to your song, but I didn't enjoy it. I got up and left. I said to myself, 'His mind is now set on finding a job, so his singing is dull.'"

Narendra felt ashamed. He blushed and remained silent.

Chapter Six

Departure

Thakur asks for a drink of water. A glass of water had already been placed close to him, but he doesn't drink it. He asks for another glass. It was later heard that a very sensual person had touched the first glass.

The pundit (*to Hazra*): "You live with him day and night. You must be supremely happy."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is a great day for me today. I have seen the moon on the second day of the bright fortnight. (*All laugh*.) Do you understand why I said the moon of the second day of the bright fortnight? Sita said to Ravana, 'Ravana, you are the full moon, and my Ramachandra is the crescent moon of the second day of the bright fortnight.' Ravana did not understand, so he was very happy. But by this, Sita meant that Ravana had reached the limit of his power and that now he would wane every day like the full moon. Ramachandra, being

the moon of the second lunar day, would shine brighter and brighter day by day."

Thakur rises. The pundit salutes him reverently, as do his friends and companions. Thakur and his disciples say goodbye.

Chapter Seven

Return to Ishan's house

Thakur returns to Ishan's house with the devotees. It is not yet dusk. They come and sit in Ishan's ground floor parlour. Some of the devotees, including a Bhagavata pundit and Ishan's sons, are already there

Sri Ramakrishna: "I said to Shashadhar, 'You want the cluster of fruit before you even climb the tree! Practice spiritual disciplines a little more. Then you can teach others.'"

Ishan: "Everybody thinks that he can teach. A glowworm thinks it is illumining the world. Somebody said, 'O glowworm, what light can you give? You only make the darkness more evident.'"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling a little*): "But he is not just a scholar. He also has some discrimination and dispassion."

The Bhagavata pundit from Bhattapada is sitting there. He is between seventy and seventy-five years old. He is watching Thakur.

The Bhagavata pundit (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "You are a great soul."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You can say that about Narada, Prahlada, or Sukadeva. I am like your child.

"But you can say so from the point of view that the devotee of God is greater than God because the devotee carries God in his heart: 'The devotee thinks of Me as small and of himself as great.' (*They all feel joy*.) Yashoda wanted to bind Krishna to her with a rope. She thought that if she didn't look after him, no one else would. Sometimes God is the magnet and the devotee a needle. By His power of attraction, He pulls the devotee. But sometimes the devotee becomes the magnet and God the needle. The devotee's attraction is so strong that, enchanted by his ecstatic love, God Himself comes to him."

Thakur is about to return to Dakshineswar. He goes to the southern verandah of the parlour. Ishan and the other devotees stand there with him. Thakur imparts many instructions to Ishan during their conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "The devotee who calls upon God while living in the household is brave and a real hero. God says: 'He who has renounced the world will naturally call upon Me and serve Me. There is no bravery in that. If he does not call upon Me, others will say, "Shame on him!" But the man who, while living in the midst of worldly duties, calls upon Me and looks after Me – after having pushed away a twenty-maund[1] stone,

1. One ton.

as it were – he is really blessed! He is brave, a hero indeed!'"

Bhagavata pundit: "The holy books say the same thing. There is the story of the pious hunter[1] and the chaste wife. An ascetic thought that he had attained a very high state because he had burned a crow and a crane to ashes [with a glance]. He went to the house of a chaste wife. She had so much love for her husband that she served him day and night. When the husband came home, she would give him water to wash his feet; she would even dry his feet with her hair. The ascetic had come as a guest. When there was delay in getting alms from her, he shouted, 'You will come to no good!' The chaste woman at once replied, 'This is not like burning a crow or a crane to ashes. Wait a little, holy man. Let me finish my service to my husband. Then I'll attend to you.'

"The same ascetic went to a pious hunter to attain the knowledge of the Absolute. The hunter used to sell meat, but he would render service to his parents day and night, looking upon them as God embodied. The ascetic was wonderstruck when he saw him. He thought, 'This butcher sells meat and is a worldly man. What knowledge of Brahman can he impart to me?' But the butcher was a knower of the Absolute."

Thakur is about to enter a carriage. He is standing near the door of Ishan's father-in-law's house. Ishan and the devotees stand close, waiting

1. Dharma Vyadha.

to say goodbye. Thakur again instructs Ishan during the course of conversation.

"Live in the world like an ant. In the world is both the True[1] and the transitory, all mixed up, just as sugar is mixed with sand. Be an ant and take only the sugar.

"Water and milk are mixed together, and so are spiritual joy and worldly pleasures. Like a swan, you must take only the milk and leave the water.

"And be like the waterfowl. When water touches its body, it flutters its wings and shakes it off. Or become like a mud fish. It lives in mud, but look at its body: it is clean and shines brightly.

"In the world[2] there is indeed a mixture of truth[3] and make-believe.[4] Discard the make-believe and take the truth."

Thakur departs for Dakshineswar in a carriage.

1. Nitya; the Absolute; the Eternal.
2. Gol-mal.
3. Mal.
4. Gol.

Section XII

Another Visit to the Sinthi Brahmo Samaj
Instructions to Vijaykrishna and Other Brahmos
Joyful Moments with Them

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna in Samadhi

The Brahmo devotees have again assembled at the Sinti Brahmo Samaj. It is 19 October 1884, the first day of the bright fortnight of the month of Kartik, the day after the Kali Puja. This is the time for the Autumn Festival. A session of the Brahmo Samaj is being held again in the beautiful garden house of Beni Madhava Pal. The morning worship is over. The Paramahamsa Deva arrives at half past four. When his carriage stops in the middle of the garden, groups of devotees immediately encircle him. The pulpit of the Samaj has been set in the first room, before which is the vestibule. Thakur enters the vestibule and sits down. The devotees follow and sit around him. They include Vijay and Trailokya among others. A former member of the Brahmo Samaj, a sub-judge, is also present.

The Samaj house has been beautifully decorated for the great celebration, with multi-coloured flags strung about here and there. Some parts of the building and the ledges of the ventilators have been decorated with green foliage to give the illusion of beautiful and attractive trees. Outside, the blue autumnal sky casts

its reflection in the clear water of the lake mentioned earlier.[1] In the garden, on both sides of the red brick-dust pathways, are rows of flowering trees and fruit trees. Today again the devotees will hear Thakur chant the Vedas; he will chant the same verses which once emanated from the mouths of the Aryan rishis. The same message was heard by the twelve unlettered fishermen disciples from the mouth of Jesus – the supreme sannyasin in human form, his mind and soul fixed in Brahman, solicitous of the suffering of mankind, the gracious, loving Lord of the devotees, God-incarnate, overwhelmed with love for God. A similar chant issued from the Lord Sri Krishna in the form of the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* on the holy field of Kurukshetra. These divine words Arjuna,[2] the humble and sincere son of Kunti, heard in thundering sounds from the mouth of Guru Sat-chit-ananda, who had come down in human form and served as his charioteer:

kaviṁ purāṇamanuśāsitāram aṇoraṇīyaṁsamanu-
smaredyaḥ ।
sarvasya dhātāramacintyarūpam ādityavarṇaṁ
tamasaḥ parastāt ।।

prayāṇakāle manasā'calena bhaktyā yukto yoga-
balena caiva ।
bhruvormadhye prāṇamāveśya samyak sa taṁ
paraṁ puruṣamupaiti divyam ।।

yadakṣaraṁ vedavido vadanti viśanti yadyatayo
vītarāgāḥ ।
yadicchanto brahmacaryaṁ caranti tatte padaṁ
saṅgraheṇa pravakṣye ।।

[He who meditates on the Omniscient, the Ancient, the Ruler, smaller than an atom, the

1. Refer Section III of this Volume, 28 October 1882.
2. Gudakesha.

support of all, of inconceivable form and sun-like
like effulgence beyond all darkness; he, with a steady mind at the time of death, with devotion and the strength of yoga, fixing his life-force between the eyebrows, reaches the Supreme Purusha.

To you I shall proclaim briefly, That which the knowers of the Veda call the Imperishable, into which ascetics, freed from passion, enter, and desiring which they lead lives of self-control.]

– Bhagavad Gita 8:9–11

As Sri Ramakrishna sits down, he sees the beautifully decorated pulpit of the Samaj and bows to pay his homage. Since they talk of God from this platform, he feels that it is a holy spot. He sees that they talk of the Imperishable from here, so all holy places meet here. As on seeing a courtroom one thinks of lawsuits and a judge, on seeing where the story of the Lord is spoken, one is inspired with God.

Trailokya sings. Sri Ramakrishna says, "You sing 'O Mother, make me mad' so beautifully. Please sing it."

Trailokya sings:

O Mother, make me mad with Your love.

What need have I for knowledge or reason?

With the wine of Your love make me drunk,

You who steal the hearts of Your devotees!

Drown me in the ocean of Your love.

In this world, Your madhouse, some laugh, some weep, some dance in joy.

Jesus, Moses, Gauranga,[1] – all are drunk with the wine of Your love.

When, O Mother, shall I join their blessed company?

In the heavens too is Your fair of madness: like guru, like disciples.

Who can understand this play of love?

O Mother, You who are mad with love, who are indeed the glory of the mad,

Make this, your beggar Premdas, rich with the treasure of love.

As Sri Ramakrishna hears the song, there is a change in his mood. He at once passes into samadhi – on seeing within himself the Great Essence beyond all essences, beyond the twenty-four cosmic principles, and beyond even mahat.[2] It is as if all his organs of action and of sense, mind, intellect, and ego have vanished. His body is as motionless as a picture. Once, seeing such a state in Sri Krishna, Yudhisthira, the chief Pandava, wept, his soul completely merged in Sri Krishna. At that time Bhishma Deva, the pride of the dynasty of the Aryans, was lying on a bed of arrows meditating deeply on God in his last moments. The Kurukshetra battle had just ended. It was a day when one cried in spite of oneself. Not able to understand Sri Krishna's state of samadhi, he wept. He was afraid that Sri Krishna had left his body.□□□□

1. Sri Chaitanya.
2. The second category in the evolution of the universe; the cosmic mind.

Chapter Two

Talk on spiritual matters – formless God of the Brahmo Samaj

After some time, Sri Ramakrishna comes back to partial consciousness and instructs the Brahmo devotees. His divine mood is so intense that he sounds intoxicated. It gradually diminishes. At last he returns to the normal state of consciousness.

"I shall eat hemp" – the Gita and the eight occult powers[1] – what is God-realization?

Sri Ramakrishna: "Mother, I don't want the joy of the Causal.[2] I shall eat siddhi.

"By siddhi, I mean the attainment of the Essence – not any of the eight occult powers. Krishna spoke of this to Arjuna. He said, 'Brother, listen. If a person has even one of the eight occult powers, he cannot attain Me.' Because with occult power comes pride, and when there is even a trace of pride, a person cannot reach God.

"There are beginners,[3] those who are practicing,[4] the spiritually mature,[5] and the most perfect among the mature ones.[6] He who has just begun spiritual practices belongs to first class. A beginner applies marks of sandalwood paste on his

1. Siddhi, the word for "occult power" also means "hemp." Sri Ramakrishna is making a play on words
2. Karanananda.
3. Pravartakas.
4. Sadhakas.
5. Siddhas.
6. The siddha of the siddhas.

forehead, applies a sectarian mark on his body,[1] and uses a rosary. He shows a lot of external signs like these. The practicing aspirant is more advanced. His tendency to show off is reduced. He has yearning for God and calls upon Him sincerely. He repeats His Name and prays to Him with a guileless heart. Who is a spiritually mature person? One who has a firm conviction that God exists and that He does everything. Such a person has seen God. And who is 'the most perfect among the mature ones?' One who has talked with God – not just seen Him, but talked to Him as a son to his father, or a mother to her child, or a friend to a friend, or as a lover to the beloved.

"It is one thing to have the faith that fire is in wood; it is another to make fire with that wood, to cook rice, and to feel filled and satisfied by eating it.

"There is no end to divine states. There is always a state higher than the one before."

God of worldly men – yearning and realization – be firm

(*In a deep spiritual mood*) "These people are Brahmajnanis and believe in God without form. This is good.

(*To Brahmo devotees*) "Believe firmly in one – either in God with form or God without form. Only then will you realize Him, not otherwise. A man with firm faith in God with form will attain Him, as will one who has firm faith in the formless God.

1. Tilak.

Whether you eat sweet bread straight or sideways, it will taste sweet both ways. (*All laugh*.)

"But you have to be steady and call upon Him with a yearning heart. Do you know what the God of a worldly man is like? Like children imitating a quarrel between a younger aunt and her elder, each saying, 'I swear by God.' It is also like a well-dressed gentleman, chewing betel leaf and holding a walking stick in his hand, who plucks a flower as he strolls in the garden and says to his companion, 'What a beautiful[1] flower God has made!' But the feeling of such a worldly man is only momentary, like a drop of water on red-hot iron.

"You have to be firm in one ideal. Dive. Without diving deep, you cannot reach the gems at the bottom of the sea. It is of no help to swim on the surface."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing in his sweet voice the same song that had charmed Keshab Sen and other devotees. All those present feel as if they are in heaven or in Vaikuntha (the abode of Lord Vishnu).

> Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty, and to the deepest depths descend: there you will find the gem of Love.
>
> Go seek, go seek, O mind, the blessed Vrindavan within your heart, the abode of the Lord of Love. Then in your heart the unceasing light of knowledge will ever shine.
>
> Who is it that steers your boat over solid ground? It is your guru, says Kabir. Listen, and meditate on his holy feet.

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1. Sri Ramakrishna actually used this word in English.

Chapter Three

In the company of Brahmo devotees – Brahmo Samaj and talk on the glory of God

Sri Ramakrishna: "Dive. Learn to love God. Forget yourself in intense love for Him. Look here, I have heard your worship. Why do you talk so much of the glory of God in your Brahmo Samaj? 'O Lord! You have made the sky. You have made big oceans. You have created the moon, the sun, the stars, and so on.' What is the need of all this?

"People are struck with wonder when they see a rich man's garden: what beautiful trees, what flowers, what a lake. They stand speechless at the sight of the drawing room and beautiful pictures. But who looks for the owner of the garden? Only one or two people. If you look for God with a longing heart, you can see Him, you can know Him, you can talk to Him just as I am talking to you. I tell you truly, you can see Him.

"But for whom do I speak these words? Who believes them?"

Scriptures and revelation – the law of revelation

"Can one reach God by reading scriptures? By reading scriptures you might at most understand that He exists. But unless you yourself dive deep, you cannot see God. Only when you have dived deep and He lets you know Him are all your doubts removed. You may read a book a thousand times, you may chant a thousand verses, but you cannot comprehend God without earnestly diving into Him. By mere scholarship you may deceive man, but you can't attain God.

"Of what use are scriptures or other holy books alone? Without His grace nothing can happen. Seek for God with a longing heart! By His grace you will see Him. He will talk to you."

Brahmo Samaj and equality – is God partial?

The sub-judge: "Does He shower His grace more on one than another? If that is so, God is guilty of partiality."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do you mean! Take the two words *ghorata* and *sarata*.[1] Both have *-ta* as a suffix. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar also said what you are saying. He asked, 'Sir, has God given more power to one than another?' I replied, 'He is present in every being as the all-pervading Spirit,[2] so he is in everything. Just as He is in me, He is in an ant, too. But there is special manifestation of God's power in some. If everybody is equal, why have we come to see you when we hear your name, Ishwar Vidyasagar? Have you two horns that we have come to see? That is not so. You are generous, you are learned. You are well-known because you have more of these qualities than others. You know, there are people who can defeat a hundred men single-handedly; others run away in fear of a single person.'

"If there is no special power, why would people consider Keshab so great?

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1. The two words *ghora* ("horse") and *sara* ("clay plate") both have the suffix .*-ta*. The power of a horse is different from that of a clay plate. Because they both end in *-ta*, they don't become equal. The horse has more power than the clay plate.
2. Vibhu.

"The Gita says: 'If a person is considered great by many, whether it is because of his learning, his ability to sing and play musical instruments, his oratory, or anything else, know it for certain that he has within him a special power of God.'"

A Brahmo devotee (*to the sub-judge*): "Please accept what he says."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the Brahmo devotee*): "What kind of a man are you? Merely accepting without conviction! It is hypocrisy. I see you as a sham."

The Brahmo devotee is very ashamed.

Chapter Four

Brahmo Samaj – Keshab and detachment in family life – renunciation of world

The earlier story of his life – instructions to Keshab – spiritual practice in a solitary place – signs of spiritual knowledge

The sub-judge: "Sir, must one renounce the family?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, why should you have to renounce the family? You can renounce even while living in the family. But in the beginning you must live for some time in a solitary place. You must practice spiritual disciplines in solitude. You should find a place near your home where you can retire and go home only for a meal. Keshab Sen, Pratap, and others told me, 'Sir, we have the same attitude as King Janaka.' I said to them, 'You cannot become King Janaka just by saying so. King

Janaka practiced many austerities in a solitary place, standing on his head. You people must do something! Only then can you become a King Janaka.' Someone may write English very fluently, but could he do that all of a sudden? He was the son of a poor man. He used to live in somebody's house, cooking for him, and ate little. He learned to read and write with great difficulty. That is how he is able to write so fluently now.

"I said something else to Keshab Sen: 'Without going into solitude, how can you get rid of a serious disease? You are a patient with delirium, living in a room in which there are pickled tamarind and a pitcher of water. How can you get rid of the disease?' Look, just by talking of tamarind pickles, my mouth has begun to water! (*All laugh*.) You all know what happens when they are within reach. For men, women are the pickled tamarind. Desire for enjoyment is the pitcher of water. There is no end to the thirst for enjoyment. Because all such things are found in the patient's room, how can the disease of delirium be cured there? You must live for a few days at a different place, where there are no tamarind pickles or pitchers of water. Later, after being cured, you can go back to the family without running any risk. After attaining God, if you live in the family, 'lust and greed' can do no harm. Then you can remain unattached like Janaka. But in the beginning you have to be careful. You have to live in solitude and carry out strict spiritual disciplines. When the ashvattha tree is a small plant, it has to be protected by a fence around it so that cows or goats won't destroy it. However, when it has grown a thick trunk, no fence

is necessary. Then, even if you tie an elephant to it, no harm can come to it. If you practice spiritual disciplines in a solitary place and develop love and devotion to the lotus feet of God and gain strength, then you can go home and live a family life. Then 'lust and greed' will not harm you at all.

"Make curds in a solitary corner, and churn them to bring out the butter. When the butter of knowledge and love for God is taken out of the milk of the mind, it will float unattached on the water of the world. But if you keep the immature mind, which is in the state of milk, in the water of the household, it will not float.

"To attain God while living a family life, hold onto His lotus feet with one hand and do your work with the other. Whenever you are free from work, hold His lotus feet with both hands, live in solitude, meditate on Him alone, and serve Him."

The sub-judge (*joyfully*): "Sir, very beautiful words indeed! There is nothing other than this! What else could be required than to practice spiritual disciplines in solitude? But we forget this. We think we have become King Janaka already. (*Sri Ramakrishna and all the others laugh.*) That there is no need to leave family life, that one can attain God even while living in the family – hearing this, my mind is happy and at peace."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why should you have to renounce? If you have to fight, it is better to fight from within a fort. You have to fight against your senses and against hunger and thirst. It is good that all these are fought while living in the household. Moreover, in the Kaliyuga life depends

on food. If you have nothing to eat, all talk of God will be knocked out of your brain. A person said to his wife, 'I am going to leave the family.' The wife was a somewhat sensible woman. She said, 'Why do you have to wander about? When you don't have to beg your bread from ten homes, go, but if you have to do that, it is better to be in one house.'

"Why do you have to renounce the home? It is convenient there. You don't have to worry about food, and there is no harm in living with your wife. In a family, all your bodily needs are easily met. If you fall ill, you have people to nurse you.

"Janaka, Vyasa, and Vasishtha lived in the family after attaining spiritual knowledge. They wielded both swords – the one of knowledge and the other of action."

The sub-judge: "Sir, how do you know when you have attained knowledge?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "When you have attained knowledge, you no longer see God at a distance. He is no longer 'He' – He becomes 'this.' Then He is seen in your own heart. God is in everybody. Whoever seeks Him finds Him."

The sub-judge: "Sir, I am a sinner. How can I say that God is within me?"

Brahmo Samaj, Christianity and the doctrine of sin

Sri Ramakrishna: "You Brahmos harp on sin! Maybe it's the view of Christianity also. Somebody gave me a book (the Bible). I asked someone to read me a little. It was all about one thing only – sin and sin. I have chanted His name – Ishvara or Rama or

Hari. How can I be a sinner? You must have such faith as this! You must have faith in the power of God's name!"

The sub-judge: "Sir, how do you have such faith?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Love Him. One of your Brahmo songs says, 'Lord, can one ever know You without loving You, by only performing worship and sacrifice?' Pray! Cry! Weep out loud to Him in solitude that you may gain such attraction for Him, such love for Him! People shed pitchers full of tears when their wives are ill, or they lose money, or for a job. Who weeps for God? Just tell me. I would like to know."

Chapter Five

Give God the power of attorney – how long do you have duties toward family

Trailokya: "Sir, he has no time. He has to work for the British."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the sub-judge*): "Well, give God the power of attorney. If you give your burden to a good person, can he ever do you wrong? Give Him your entire burden with a sincere heart, and then be at peace. Do only the work He assigns to you.

"A kitten doesn't have a calculating mind. It just cries, 'Mew, mew.' If its mother puts it in the kitchen, it lies there. It only mews for its mother. And when the mother puts it on a bed, it is the same: it just repeats, 'Mew, mew.'"

The sub-judge: "We are householders. How long do we have to attend to worldly duties?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Of course you have duties to do – to bring up your children, to provide for your wife, and to save money for her when you are no more. If you don't do these, you are a heartless fellow. Sukadeva and other sages had compassion. A person who has no compassion is not a human being."

The sub-judge: "How long must one look after one's children?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Till they reach adulthood. When a bird grows up and can look after itself, its mother forces it out of the nest with its beak. She doesn't let it near." (*All laugh*.)

The sub-judge: "What is one's duty toward one's wife?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "During your lifetime you must instruct her in religion and must provide for her. If she is chaste, you must make plans for her care when you are gone.

"However, when a person is overwhelmed with spiritual knowledge, he is left with no duties to perform. God takes charge when you are no longer able to do so. When a zemindar dies, leaving behind a minor son, a guardian takes the entire responsibility for the boy. It is a matter of law. You know that quite well."

The sub-judge: "Yes, Sir."

Vijay Goswami: "Ah, beautiful! God Himself takes up the burden of one who meditates on Him

with a fixed mind, who is mad with ecstatic love for Him. A minor at once gets a guardian. Oh, when will such a state of mind come? Whoever experiences such a state is lucky indeed!"

Trailokya: "Sir, is it possible to gain true knowledge of God while living in the world? Can one really attain God?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "Why not? You are already completely absorbed in Him! (*All laugh.*) You are already living in the world, and you have given your mind to Him. Why shouldn't it be possible to realize God in the household? Certainly it is."

Signs of a householder jnani – signs of God-realization – free in this very life[1]

Trailokya: "What are the signs of a householder's having attained knowledge of God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Tears flow from his eyes, and the hair on his body stands on end at the name of God. No sooner does he hear the sweet name of God than the hair on his body stands on end and a stream of tears flows from the eyes.

"As long as there is attachment to worldly things, as long as there is attraction for 'lust and greed,' body-consciousness doesn't leave you. The fewer the attachments, the nearer you are to knowledge of the Self,[2] and to the same extent, body-consciousness becomes less. One attains knowledge of the Atman when attachment to the

1. Jivanmukta.
2. Atmajnana.

world has completely disappeared. Then one begins to feel that the soul is one and the body another. It is difficult to separate the kernel of a coconut from its shell with a knife until the water in it has dried up. When the water is dried up, you only have to strike and shake it and the kernel becomes detached. This is called a dry coconut.

"The signs of God-realization are that a man becomes like a dry coconut – he is rid of identification with the body. Pleasure and pain of the body are no longer his concern. He does not seek comforts for the body. He roams about as one liberated in this very life.[1]

"Kali's devotees are free in this very life. They are full of unending joy.

"When you see tears begin to flow and the hair on the body stand on end at the very name of God, know that attachment to 'lust and greed' has disappeared and that one has realized God. If a matchstick is dry, strike it just once, and it will light. If it is wet, you may strike it fifty times, but it won't ignite. You've just wasted the wooden sticks. If your mind is immersed in the liquid of worldly pleasures and is wet with 'lust and greed,' inspiration for God-consciousness will not arise. You may try a thousand times, but all your efforts will be in vain. It is only when the liquid of attachment to worldly pleasures dries up that there is instantaneous inspiration for God."

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1. Jivanmukta.

Yearning is the way – He is your very own Mother

Trailokya: "How do we dry up our craving for worldly pleasures?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Call on the Divine Mother with a longing heart. The liquid of worldly desire dries up on seeing Her; your attachment to 'lust and greed' will fully disappear. It happens at the very moment you realize that He is your own Mother. He is not your stepmother; He is your own Mother! Be earnest and even stubborn with Her! A boy holds onto his mother's sari when he asks her for money to buy a kite. Perhaps the mother is busy talking to other women, and at first she refuses outright, saying, 'No, your father doesn't want me to give you any money. I'll ask him when he comes. You might cause an accident by playing with a kite now.' But when the boy starts crying and refuses to leave, the mother says to her friends, 'Just wait a minute, sisters. Let me pacify this boy. I'll be right back.' Saying this, she opens her cash box with a key and throws a pice to the boy. You also must become stubborn with the Mother. She will certainly grant you Her vision. I said the same thing to some Sikhs. They had come to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. We talked in front of Mother Kali's shrine, and they said, 'God is all compassion.' I said, 'How is that?' They answered, 'Because, Sir, He is always looking after us. He gives us righteousness[1] and wealth[2] – everything. He gives us food.' I said, 'When somebody has children, doesn't he take the responsibility of

1. Dharma.
2. Artha.

feeding them? Does somebody else from the neighborhood take up the duty?'"

The sub-judge: "So is He not compassionate, sir?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why should He not be? I only told them that He is our very own. We can force Him! To our nearest and dearest, we can even say, 'You rascal, are you going to give it to me?'"

Chapter Six

Ego and the sub-judge

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the sub-judge*): "Well, do you think pride and ego come from knowledge or from ignorance? Pride is characteristic of the tamoguna and comes from ignorance. It becomes a veil through which one cannot see God. All troubles cease when the ego vanishes. Pride is of no use. Neither this body nor wealth is going to last. A drunkard was looking at an image of Durga. Seeing her decoration and adornments he said, 'Mother, You may decorate Yourself as much as You like, but after two or three days, they will pull You out and throw You into the Ganges!' So I tell everybody – whether a judge or anybody else – all this is for two days only. So give up pride and ego."

The Brahmo Samaj and equality – people have different natures

"The characteristics of sattva, rajas, and tamas are quite different. The signs of the tamoguna are pride, sloth, gluttony, lust, anger, and so on. A rajoguni has a tendency to involve himself more

and more in work and to dress well. He keeps his house clean and tidy. He also keeps a photo of the queen in the drawing room. When he meditates on God, he puts on a pure silk cloth and a string of rudraksha and gold beads. When someone comes to see the shrine, he guides the visitor, saying, 'Come this way, there is more: see the white marble floor, see the assembly hall[1] with sixteen openings.' And he makes a show of his charity. A sattvaguna person is very calm and quiet. Any clothes do for him. He earns only enough to live on and would never flatter anybody for money. His house remains in want of repair, he doesn't worry about his children's clothing, he makes no effort for name or fame. He meditates and gives away in charity secretly, so that nobody comes to know of it. He meditates inside a mosquito net so people think that he did not sleep at night and is sleeping late into the morning. Sattvaguna is the last step of the staircase. After it comes the roof. After sattvaguna is acquired, God-realization is not far off. Just a little more progress and He is attained. (*To the sub-judge*) You said that all people are equal. Just see how many different natures there are!

"And then there are many other kinds of human being: the ever-free,[2] the liberated,[3] aspirants,[4] and the bound.[5] There are so many different types! Narada and Sukadeva are ever-free. They are like a steamboat which not only crosses over but also

1. Natmandir.
2. Nityajivas.
3. Muktajivas.
4. Mumukshujivas.
5. Baddhajivas.

carries big animals, even an elephant. They are like the superintendent of an estate.[1] Having governed one part,[2] he goes to govern another. Then there are seekers after liberation who try earnestly with all their hearts and souls to free themselves from the net of the world. Only one or two of them escape from the net. They become the liberated. The ever-free are like clever fish: they never become entangled in the net of the world. As for the bound souls, worldly people, they never even become aware that they are in the mesh of the net and bound by it. Such people, when they hear talk about God, leave the place, saying, 'The name of God is taken at the time of death. Why now?' And when he is lying on his deathbed, the worldly man says to his wife and children, 'Why is the lamp burning so brightly? Lower the wick a little. Too much oil is being consumed.' Thinking of his children and wife he weeps, saying, 'Alas, what will happen to them when I am gone?' The bound person repeats those very actions that made him suffer so much in the first place. He is like a camel which bleeds profusely when it eats thorny bushes, but it doesn't give up eating them. His son has died, leaving him in grief, but he produces more children year after year. Everything he has is spent on his daughter's marriage, but he goes on begetting daughters every year. He says, 'I can't help it. It is my fate.' If he goes on pilgrimage, he doesn't find time to meditate on God. He tires himself out just carrying the luggage of his wife and children. In the

1. Tehsildar, a sub-divisional revenue officer.
2. Taluka.

temple all he does is get holy water[1] for his son to drink and make him bow to the Deity and so on. A bound soul takes up service under others to earn a living for himself, his wife, and his children. He earns money by telling lies, cheating, and flattery. Such a person looks down on those who call upon God and meditate on Him, saying they are mad. (*To the sub-judge*) There are so many kinds of men, you see! You said men were equal. But how many varieties there are! Some have more power, some less."

A bound soul does not take the name of the Lord at the time of death

"A bound soul, attached to worldliness, talks only of the world at the time of death. What use is it to superficially count the beads or take a bath in the Ganges or visit holy places? If within oneself is attachment for the world, only the world comes before the eyes at the time of death. What nonsense such a person talks on his deathbed. Perhaps he cries out in delirium, 'Turmeric powder! Five-spiced blend! Cassia leaf!' A parrot might normally repeat 'Radha Krishna' but when a cat seizes it, the only sound that comes out of it is 'Kaa! Kaa!' The Gita says the same thing, that you will carry with you to your next life what you think at the time of your death. King Bharata left his body repeating, 'Deer, deer.' So he was reborn as a deer. If you think of God at the time of death, you attain Him, and then you don't have to return to this world.

1. Charamrita.

The Brahmo devotee: "Sir, say one has meditated on God at other times, but not at the time of death. Does it mean that he will have to come to this world of pleasure and pain again? Why would that be so if he had meditated on God earlier?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A man might meditate on God but have no faith in Him. Time and again he forgets Him and becomes attached to the world. It's like washing an elephant. It soils itself again with mud and dust. The mind is like a mad elephant.[1] But if the elephant is taken to its stable soon after the bath, it can't rub mud and dust on its body. If a person thinks of God at the time of death, the mind is purified. Such a mind does not get another chance to become attached to 'lust and greed.'

"People have no faith in God. That's why they suffer so much from the consequences of actions. People say that when you take a dip in the Ganges, your sins leave you and perch themselves on a tree at the bank of the river. As soon as you return to the bank after the bath, all your sins fly back again to sit firmly on your shoulders. (*All laugh*.) You must prepare beforehand, so that your mind is in God at the time of death. The way is in constant practice.[2] Then you will remember God in your last moments."

The Brahmo devotee: "We've had a nice conversation. Very nice indeed!"

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1. Manamattakari.
2. Abhyasa yoga.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Oh, I've just been talking at random. But do you know my inner state of mind? 'I am the instrument and He is the operator; I am the dwelling and He is the dweller; I am the engine, He is the engineer; I am the chariot, He is the charioteer. I move as He makes me move; I do as He makes me do.'"

Chapter Seven

Sri Ramakrishna joyfully singing God's name

Trailokya sings again, accompanied by drum and cymbal. Sri Ramakrishna is dancing, mad with love for God. He has gone into samadhi a number of times while dancing. Now he stands in samadhi – his body motionless, eyes fixed, face smiling, leaning on the shoulder of a dear devotee. When he comes down a little from that state, he dances like an intoxicated elephant. Regaining external consciousness, he adds his own lines to the song:

Mother, dance around Your devotees,

Dancing Yourself, make them dance too.

O, my Mother, dance in the lotus of my heart.

O Brahmamayi, whose essence is Brahman,

Dance in Your world-bewitching form!

It is a rare sight, the dance of this divine child maddened with love, his soul merged in the Divine Mother. Brahmo devotees dance around him like iron filings around a magnet. They all chant the name of Brahman in a frenzy of love. Then they chant the sweet name of Brahman, the name of Mother. Many of them weep like children as they repeat, "Mother, Mother!"

When the singing ends, they all take seats. The evening worship of the Samaj has not yet been performed. In the joy of singing, all rules had been brushed aside. The plans had been for Vijaykrishna Goswami to take the pulpit after dusk. It is about 8 p.m.

Everyone is now seated, Sri Ramakrishna also has taken his seat. Vijay is sitting in front of him. A message comes that Vijay's old mother-in-law and some other women devotees would like to see Sri Ramakrishna and talk to him, so Thakur goes into another room to meet them.

He returns in a little while and says to Vijay, "What great and loving devotion your mother-in-law has for God! She says, 'I will not talk about worldly things now – there, one wave disappears as another wave arrives.' I said, 'What does it matter to you? You already have knowledge.' At this, your mother-in-law said, 'What knowledge do I have? I have not yet gone beyond vidyamaya (the power of knowledge) and avidyamaya (power of nescience). It is not enough to go beyond avidya. You have to go beyond vidya too. Then alone will you gain spiritual knowledge. You say so yourself.'"

While they are talking, Beni Pal enters.

Beni Pal (*to Vijay*): "Sir, please rise. It is already very late. Please start the worship."

Vijay: "Sir, what is the need of worship now? You have provided the rice pudding first[1] – and then the lentils and other dishes."

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1. Payas.

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "As is the devotee, so is the provision made by him. The sattvic devotee provides the rice pudding, the rajasic one offers fifty dishes to the deity, while the tamasic devotee sacrifices a goat or some other animal."

Vijay ponders whether or not he should go up to the podium for worship.

Chapter Eight

Lectures in the Brahmo Samaj – duties of a religious teacher – God alone is the guru
[Instructions to Vijay]

Vijay: "If you will bless me, I will speak from the pulpit."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's all right if there is no pride. 'I am lecturing, you listen' – it is all right if you don't have this attitude of ego. What are pride and ego? Do they result from knowledge or from ignorance? Only the person who has no pride can attain knowledge. Rainwater flows down from a higher level; it stands at a lower level.

"As long as you have egotism, you cannot gain knowledge. You also can't attain liberation. You will have to come again and again to this world. A calf bellows 'hamba hamba' ('I, I'), so it has to undergo so much suffering! The butcher cuts it up; its skin is used to make shoes and drums. How much beating a drum takes! There is no end to its suffering! Last of all, strings are made with its intestines for the carder's bow. When the sound 'tuhun tuhun' ('you, you') is uttered by the carder's string, only then is it freed. It no longer says, 'I, I,'

only 'you, you.' In other words, 'God, You are the doer; I do nothing. You are the operator; I am the machine. Indeed, You are all.'"

Sri Ramakrishna and being a guru

"Guru, father, and doer – these three words prick my body like thorns. I am His son, His eternal child. How can I be a father? God is the doer; I do nothing. He is the operator; I am the machine.

"If anyone calls me guru, I say to him, 'What guru? Away with you, rascal!' There is no guru other than Sat-chit-ananda (Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute). Except for Him, there is no shelter. He alone is the pilot that takes one across the sea of the world.

(*To Vijay*) "It is very difficult to be a spiritual teacher. It is harmful for him to see a dozen men accept him as guru. Crossing one leg over the other and saying, 'Listen to what I say,' is a very bad attitude. Such a person gets that way with the respect of only a dozen people. People will at most say, 'Ah, how well Vijay Babu speaks! He is a great man of knowledge!' I say, 'Don't think this way.' As for me, I say to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, You are the mechanic, I am Your instrument. I work as You make me work; I speak as You make me speak.'"

Vijay (*humbly*): "I shall go up to the podium and speak only if you give me permission."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "What can I say? The moon is everybody's uncle. Why don't you ask Him? If you are sincere, there is nothing to be afraid of."

When Vijay requested Sri Ramakrishna yet again, he said, "Yes. Go. Follow the rules. It's okay if you have sincere love for God."

Vijay goes to the podium and offers worship according to the Brahmo custom. He repeats, "Mother, Mother" during his prayer. Everyone is moved.

After worship, preparations are made to serve the devotees. All the cotton carpets and the thick wool ones are removed, and leaf plates are put on the floor. The devotees sit down to eat. Sri Ramakrishna is also given a seat. Full of joy, he sits down and offers to God tasty luchis, kichouris, papad, various kinds of sweets, curd, and the rice pudding brought by Beni Pal. And then he partakes of the prasad.

Chapter Nine

Mother Kali and Brahman are one when one gains the highest knowledge

After the meal, everyone prepares to return home; they all chew betel leaves. Before leaving, Sri Ramakrishna sits in a corner and talks to Vijay. M. is present.

Brahmo Samaj and the Motherhood of God

Sri Ramakrishna: "You prayed to God addressing Him, 'Mother, Mother.' This is very good. They say that one is attracted more by mother than by father. You can force your mother, but you can't force your father. Carts full of money were being brought from the estate of Trailokya's mother with many men in red turbans guarding it

with sticks in their hands. Trailokya was waiting on the side of the road with his people. He forcibly took the whole treasure. You can use a great deal of force when it concerns your mother's treasure. Don't they say that a mother can't go to law against her son?"

Vijay: "If Brahman is the Divine Mother, is He with form or without form?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Brahman is the same as Kali, the Primal Power. When inactive, I call It Brahman. When creating, preserving, and dissolving, I call It Shakti (Power). Still water is an illustration of Brahman. When in motion, that same water is like Shakti, or Kali. Kali is She who communes with Mahakala, Brahman. Kali is with form, and again She is without form. If you believe in the Formless, then meditate on Kali as being formless. Be firm in one ideal. She Herself will make you understand what She is. When you reach Shyampukur, you will also know Telepada.[1] Then you will know that He is not only Existence, but He also speaks to you the way I am speaking to you. Have faith. It will all become clear. And there is one other thing. If you believe in the Formless, be firm in your belief, but don't be dogmatic, don't emphasize that God can be only this and not that. Say, 'I believe that God is formless. What else God is, only He knows. I don't know, and I can't understand.' Can a person with an ounce of intelligence know the nature of God? Can a one-seer container hold four seers of milk? If He, in His

1. The village of Shyampukur neighbours Telepada.

grace, grants His vision and makes one understand, then alone can one understand, not otherwise. That which is Brahman is also Shakti, the Divine Mother."

It is He that I worship as Mother.

Says Ramprasad, shall I give away this secret in the teeming marketplace?

Why not guess, O mind, who that being is, from the hints that have been dropped?

"And then Ramprasad also says:

Knowing now the secret that Kali is one with the highest Brahman,

I've cast off both righteousness and unrighteousness for evermore.

"Adharma, unrighteousness, means engaging in unrighteous acts. Dharma, righteousness, means duties prescribed by the scriptures – so much charity, so much feeding of brahmins."

Vijay: "What remains after one has given up both dharma and adharma?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Pure love of God. I said to the Divine Mother: Here is your dharma and here is your adharma; take them both, and give me pure love. Here is your virtue and here is your vice; take them both, and grant me pure love for you. Here is your knowledge, and here is your ignorance; take them both, and grant me pure love for you.

"Just see, I didn't ask for knowledge, nor did I ask for worldly fame. When one has given up dharma and adharma, that which remains is pure

love – unalloyed love,[1] untainted by desires,[2] love for God that wells up unbidden out of the depths of the immortal soul."[3]

Brahmo Samaj and the Brahman of Vedanta – the Primal Power

A Brahmo devotee: "Is God different from His power?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "After one has attained the highest knowledge,[4] both God and His Power are realized as one and the same, like a jewel and its lustre are inseparable. As soon as the brilliance of a jewel comes to the mind, one thinks of the jewel. Just like milk is inseparable from its whiteness – think of one and you think of the other. But this oneness does not come about until one has attained the highest knowledge. Having attained the highest knowledge, one goes into samadhi and then goes beyond the twenty-four cosmic principles, including the ego. How one feels in samadhi cannot be described in words. Coming down a little, one can give only a hint of it. When I repeat 'Om, Om' after samadhi, I have already come down a hundred cubits. Brahman is beyond the Vedic doctrine. One cannot speak of It. There is no 'I' or 'you' there.

"As long as there is I' and 'you', as long as there is the knowledge, 'I pray or I meditate,' so long does the feeling of 'You (the Lord) listen to my prayer' exist. Then one thinks of God as a person. 'You are

1. Amla bhakti.
2. Nishkama bhakti.
3. Ahehtuki bhakti.
4. Purna jnana.

the Master, I am Your servant; You are the whole, I am Your part; You are the Mother, I am Your son' – this awareness remains within. There is a feeling of difference: I am one, and You are another. This feeling of duality, He Himself gives us. That is why one is aware of being a male or a female. Or why one feels that here is light and there is darkness, and so on. As long as there is awareness of difference, one has to believe in Shakti, the Personal God. He Himself has kept this 'I-ness' in us. Reason a thousand times, but this 'I' does not leave you. And as long as it exists, He manifests as a person.

"As long as there is 'I', as long as you are conscious of duality, you cannot insist that Brahman is without attributes. You must accept Brahman with attributes. This very Brahman with attributes has been called Kali or Primal Power in the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras."

Vijay: "How can we have a vision of this Primal Power? Or how can we have the knowledge of Brahman without attributes?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Pray to Him with a yearning heart and weep. This will purify your mind. In clear water you can see the reflection of the sun. In the mirror of the 'I,' the devotee sees Brahman with attributes, the Primal Power. But the mirror must be perfectly clean. If there is any dirt, it will not catch the correct reflection.

"As long as there is 'I,' you see the sun in the water of 'I.' There is no other way to see the sun. And as long as you have no means to see the real sun and you see only the reflected sun, that

reflected sun is the real sun to you – one hundred percent real. As long as the 'I' is real, the reflected sun is also real – one hundred percent real. This reflected sun is the Primal Power.

"If you want to attain the knowledge of Brahman, proceed toward the real sun through the reflection. Pray to Brahman with attributes, who listens to your prayers. He Himself will grant you the knowledge of Brahman. This is because He who is Brahman with attributes is Himself Brahman without attributes. He who is Shakti is Himself Brahman. One realizes that there is no duality after attaining the ultimate knowledge.

"The Divine Mother grants knowledge of Brahman too. But usually a real lover of God doesn't want it.

"And there is another path, the path of knowledge – a very difficult path indeed. You members of the Brahmo Samaj are not followers of the path of knowledge, you are lovers of God. Those who follow the path of knowledge believe that Brahman is real and the world an illusion, like a dream. I, you, and everything else are like a dream."

Ill-will and the Brahmo Samaj

"God is the inner controller. Pray to Him longingly with a pure mind. He will make you understand everything. Give up egotism and take refuge in Him. You will get everything.

Dwell, O my mind, within yourself,

And enter no one else's house.

If you search within yourself,

You will find there all you seek:

God Himself, the philosopher's stone, is the supreme wealth

That can give you all you want.

At the outer court of the wish fulfilling gem,[1] so many gems lie strewn!

"When you mix with other people, you should be affectionate to them all, be one with them, have no grudge against anyone, whether a person believes in God with form and does not believe in the formless or accepts the formless and does not believe in God with form. 'So-and-so is a Hindu, so-and-so is a Muslim or a Christian' – do not say this; do not turn away or show contempt. God has given them a different understanding. Know that people have different natures. Know this and mix in their company as much as possible, and love them. Then retire to your chamber and enjoy peace and happiness.

Lighting the lamp of knowledge in the chamber of your heart, see the face of the Mother, the embodiment of Brahman.

"You will be able to see your true Self only within your own chamber. When the cowherd boys come out to graze their cows, all the cows mix together in the field and form a single herd. When they return home at dusk, they again separate. Each remains by itself in its stall."

1. Chintamani.

Sannyasins should not accumulate – Beni Pal's good use of wealth

After 10:00 p.m. Sri Ramakrishna enters the carriage to return to the Kali temple in Dakshineswar. He is accompanied by one or two devotees. It is very dark. The carriage is waiting under a tree. Beni Pal comes with some luchis and sweets for Ramlal.

Beni Pal: "Sir, Ramlal wasn't able to come. With your permission I'd like to send some food to him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Babu Beni Pal, please don't send all this with me! It is harmful to me! I can't carry anything with me, I must not accumulate. Please don't be offended."

Beni Pal: "As you please. But please bless me."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It has been a very enjoyable day. He is a real man who holds his wealth as his slave. Those who don't know the right use of money are not men, though they are born as human beings. They only have the looks of a man, but the conduct of a beast. Blessed you are. You have given joy to so many devotees."

Section XIII

With Devotees at Dakshineswar

Chapter One

In Dakshineswar with Manomohan, Mahima, and other devotees

Come, brother. Let's go again for his darshan.[1] You will see the great man, the child who knows nothing but the Divine Mother and who has come in a human body for our sake. He will tell us how to solve the difficult problems of life. He will instruct the sannyasins, he will instruct householders. His door is open. He is waiting for us at the Kali Temple of Dakshineswar. Come, let us go see him.

He is a man of infinite qualities, of joyful countenance, whose sweet words bring tears to the eyes. Let us go, brother. Let us realize the aim of human life by meeting Sri Ramakrishna, who is intoxicated day and night with love for God, and who is the ocean of motiveless grace.

It is Sunday, 26 October 1884, the autumn season.[2] It is midday on the 7th day of the bright fortnight of the month of Kartik. Devotees have gathered in Thakur's room. There is a semi-circular verandah to its west and then a garden path running north-south further to the west of it. A flower garden for Mother Kali is just beyond this path. And then there is the embankment and the holy river Ganges flowing south.

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1. Seeing, experiencing; paying respect to a holy place or person by a ceremonial visit; also the blessing or purification felt in the presence of holiness.
2. Hemant.

It is a mart of joy here today. Sri Ramakrishna's bliss and love for God are reflected in the faces of the devotees. How wonderful it is! Such joy is not only mirrored in the devotees' faces, but is also reflected in the garden outside, in the leaves of the trees, in the various kinds of flowers, on the vast bosom of the Ganges, in the blue sky lit up by the sun, in the cool breeze carrying drops of Ganges water flowing from the feet of Sri Krishna.[1] How amazing! Truly, even the particles of dust in the garden are filled with sweetness! I wish I could roll in the dust, secretly or with the devotees. I wish I could stand in this garden the whole day, gazing at the sweetly flowing waters of the Ganges. I wish I could embrace and talk with the creepers, bushes, shrubs, and the bright and beautiful trees adorned with leaves and flowers, feeling them my own. Doesn't Sri Ramakrishna stroll this path? Doesn't he walk among these trees, creepers, and shrubs? I wish my gaze could always be on this luminous vault of the sky! I see here the earth and the heavens all swimming in the joy of love.

How is it that the priest, the doorkeeper, and the attendants of the shrine all seem to be my very own? Why does this place appear as sweet as the motherland after a long absence? The sky, the Ganges, the temple of the deity, the garden path, the trees, the creepers, the bushes and shrubs, the attendants, the devotees seated there – they all seem to be made of the same material, the material of which Sri Ramakrishna is made. It is like a garden of wax in which everything – the trees, the plants, the fruits and the leaves – is made of the same material. The garden path, the gardener, the residents of the garden, the houses in the garden – all are made of wax. Everything in this place has been molded of joy!

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1. Murari; M. is alluding here to a Vaishnava belief that explains the origination of the Ganges as Brahma washing the feet of the Incarnation of God, Vamana; in Vaishnava tradition the Incarnation of God is Krishna.

Manomohan, Mahimacharan, and M. arrive first. Then one by one Ishan, Hriday, and Hazra arrive. There are many other devotees besides them. Balaram and Rakhal are in holy Vrindavan, but some new devotees visit these days. Narayan, Paltu, the Younger Narendra, Tejchandra, Binode, Haripada, and Baburam come and stay sometimes. Rama, Suresh, Kedar, Devendra, and other devotees also come frequently – some every week, some every two weeks. Latu lives here permanently. Yogen's house is nearby; he comes almost every day. Whenever Narendra comes, it turns into a mart of joy. He sings the glories and names of God in his sweet and rare voice, rare even for the gods, sending Thakur immediately into various spiritual moods and into samadhi. It becomes a special festival. Thakur wishes that some of the boys would stay with him day and night, for they are pure souls not bound by the ties of marriage and worldly work. He had asked Baburam (later Swami Premananda) to stay on, and sometimes he does stay. Adhar Sen also comes frequently.

The devotees are seated in the room. Sri Ramakrishna stands there, like a child, in a reflective mood. The devotees are watching him.

The Undifferentiated and the differentiated

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Manomohan*): "I see Rama in everyone. You who are sitting here – I see Rama in all of you in different forms."

Manomohan: "Rama has become all forms. But, as you say, 'Apo Narayana' – water is Narayana – but some water is fit for drinking, some only for washing the face, and some only for washing utensils."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, but I see that He alone is everything. He has become the world and its creatures."

Saying this, Thakur sits down on his smaller cot.

Sri Ramakrishna's insistence on truth and aversion to accumulating things

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan*): "I ask you now, is it excessive of me to think that I have to speak only the truth? If I suddenly say I won't eat, I can't eat even if I'm hungry. If I say that so-and-so has to take my wash pot to the jhautala and if someone else does it instead, I have to send that person back. What has happened to me, brother? Is there anything to do about it?

"And then I can't carry anything with me – betel-leaf, food, or anything else – because that would mean keeping things for the future. I can't even carry a lump of clay in my hand!"

Just then somebody comes in and says, "Sir, Hriday[1] has come to Jadu Mallick's garden. He is standing at the gate and wishes to see you." Sri Ramakrishna says to the devotees, "Please stay here. Let me talk to Hriday for a while." He puts on black varnished slippers and walks toward the eastern gate. Only M. accompanies him. They walk eastward along the garden path, which is surfaced

1. Hriday Mukherji is the son of Ramakrishna's cousin. His home is in Seor village near Kamarpukur. For almost twenty-four years Hriday stayed with Thakur, served him, and carried out the worship of Mother Kali at the Dakshineswar Temple. Later, he lost the confidence of the proprietor of the temple garden and therefore was not allowed to remain.

with red brick dust. They pass the treasurer, standing on the path, who bows to Thakur. A bearded gatekeeper sits at the gate of the southern courtyard. To the left is the kuthi, the house of the owners of the temple garden. A nilkuthi[1] used to grow here so it is called the kuthi. Beyond it flowering trees line both sides of the path and not far to the south of the path is a gazitala tree and the beautiful steps of Mother Kali's reservoir. Then comes the eastern gate, the gatekeepers' quarters to the left and the planter of tulasi bushes to the south. Coming out of the garden, Sri Ramakrishna finds Hriday standing near the gate of Jadu Mallick's garden.

Chapter Two

The attendant stands there

Hriday stands there with folded hands. As soon as he sees Sri Ramakrishna, he falls down prostrate on the road. Thakur asks him to stand up. Hriday folds his hands again and starts weeping like a child.

How strange! Sri Ramakrishna also begins to weep. There are tears in his eyes. He wipes them with his hands; yet his eyes look dry, as though he had not shed tears. How is this possible? This fellow Hriday has caused him so much trouble, but he has come so hurriedly to see him and is crying!

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why have you come now?"

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1. Indigo plant.

Hriday (*weeping*): "I have come to see you. To whom else can I tell my sorrows?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling to console him*): "In the world there are problems. Happiness and sorrow are a part of worldly life. (*Pointing at M.*) These people come now and then just for this reason. They come here to hear a word or two about God and find some peace. What is your problem?"

Hriday (*still weeping*): "I've lost your company. That is my grief."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But you said yourself, 'You live the way you want and let me do the same.'"

Hriday: "Yes, I did say that. But what did I know?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Go on home now. We'll sit and talk about it some other day. It is Sunday and many people have come. They're waiting. Did you have a good crop this year in the country?"

Hriday: "It wasn't bad."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Let me say goodbye now. Come again some other day."

Hriday again lies prostrate on the ground in salutation. Thakur returns to his room with M. by the same path.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "He tormented me as much as he served me. When I was reduced to a skeleton with stomach trouble and couldn't eat, he'd say, 'Just see how I eat. You can't eat because of the state of your mind.' And then he'd add, 'Fool, if I weren't here, what would have happened to your self-styled holiness?' One day he troubled me

so much that I went to the embankment to drown myself in the flood tide."

M. is speechless to hear this. He wonders how Thakur could be shedding tears for such a man.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Well, he did me so much service. How has he come to such a pass? He looked after me just like one looks after a child. I used to lie unconscious day and night. Besides, I was ill for so long. What happened to me was totally in his hands."

What can M. say? He remains silent, saying to himself: Perhaps Hriday didn't serve Thakur selflessly.

Thakur reaches his room while they talk. The devotees are waiting. Thakur goes in and sits on the smaller cot.

Chapter Three

With devotees – talks on various subjects – the profound meaning of ecstasy[1] and the highest manifestation of divine love[2]

Besides Mahimacharan and the other usual visitors, a number of devotees from Konnagar have arrived. One of them talks with Sri Ramakrishna for a long time.

Devotee from Konnagar: "Sir, I heard that you go into ecstasy, that you experience samadhi. Why and how does it happen? Please tell me."

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1. Bhava.
2. Mahabhava.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Radha used to experience the highest manifestation of divine love. When a gopi friend[1] wanted to touch her, another said, 'Her body is enjoying Krishna. Don't touch her. Krishna is sporting in her.' One doesn't attain ecstasy or this highest state of divine love without realizing God. When a fish comes up from deep water, the water splashes up behind it. The bigger the fish, the greater the splash. In ecstasy a man laughs, weeps, dances, and sings.

"One can't remain in ecstasy long. If a person just keeps looking at himself in a mirror, people think he's crazy."

The devotee from Konnagar: "Sir, we hear that you often see God. Please show Him to us."

Vision of God not possible without spiritual practices

Sri Ramakrishna: "Everything happens by the will of God. What can a man do? While repeating His name, sometimes tears flow from his eyes, sometimes they don't. Sometimes when meditating on Him, one feels inspiration; at other times nothing happens.

"You have to work for it. Only then can God be seen. One day I had a vision of the Haldarpukur. I saw that a person of low caste was taking water from it after removing the scum from its surface. Each time he took water in his palm, he examined it. It was as if he was telling me that you can't see the water unless you remove the scum. You can't gain devotion or see God without making an effort.

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1. Sakhi.

Meditation and repetition of name are all work; singing His name and glories is also work. And then, charity and worship are work.

"If you want butter, you have to make curd from milk and then keep it in a quiet place. When the milk is curdled, you have to make the effort to churn it and take out the butter."

Mahimacharan: "Yes sir, no doubt one has to work for it. What can be gained without work? A lot of effort is needed. Only then can one achieve something. How much study is needed! There are so many holy books!"

What comes first: study (knowledge and reasoning) or God-realization?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan*): "How many holy books can you read? What will you gain by only reasoning? First try to attain Him. Putting your faith in the words of the guru, make some effort. If you have no guru, pray to God with a longing heart. He Himself will tell you what He is.

"What will you learn of God by reading books? Until you have reached the marketplace, you only hear noises in the distance. It is quite different when you reach the market. Then you see clearly, you hear clearly: 'Take these potatoes. Pay for them.'

"From a distance you hear only an indistinct sound from the sea. When you go near it, you see many ships sailing, birds flying, and waves rising and falling.

"You cannot experience God by reading books. It is quite different. After realizing God, books, scriptures, science, all seem insignificant, like dry straw.

"You have to introduce yourself to the master of the house. Before that, why are you so eager to know how many houses, gardens, and certificates of company stock he owns? If you go to his servants, they won't help you. What information can they give you of the company shares? On the other hand, try somehow to meet the master, even if you are pushed aside or you have to jump over the fence. He himself will tell you how many houses and gardens and shares he has. When you know the master, the servants, the doorkeeper, and everyone else will salute you."[1] (*Everybody laughs*.)

The devotee: "So, how do we meet the master of the house?" (*All laugh*.)

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's why work for God is necessary. It does no good to say, 'God is,' and just sit there. Somehow you have to approach Him. Call upon Him secretly, pray to Him, 'Please grant me Thy vision. Grant! Please!' Say this and cry with a longing heart. Just as you roam about madly for 'lust and gold,' be a little mad for Him. Let people say that so-and-so person has gone mad for God. Give up everything for some days and only call upon Him secretly.

"What will it help just to say, 'He exists,' and do nothing about it? There are big fish in the

1. Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:33)

Haldarpukur. Can you catch them by simply sitting on the bank? To attract them, you have to prepare some food and throw it into the pond. The fish will come up slowly from deep water and ruffle the surface. You will then feel happy. Perhaps you see a little bit of the fish once – and then one suddenly jumps and splashes. You are even happier when you see that.

"Turn milk into curds and churn it. Only then will you get butter.

(*To Mahima*) "What a bother this is! For somebody to show him God while he continues just to sit at ease! To extract the butter and take it to his mouth! (*All laugh.*) What trouble! Someone else must catch the fish and hand it over to him!

"Somebody wants to meet the king. The king is beyond the seven gates. Even before passing through the first gate, he asks, 'Where is the king?' The way is to pass through all the gates one by one."

The way to attain God – yearn for Him

Mahimacharan: "What must we do to attain Him?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's not that you can attain Him by doing this and not by doing that. It depends on His grace. Yet you have to take to some action with a yearning heart. Longing for Him brings His grace.

"One needs the opportunity – the company of holy people, discrimination, finding a true

preceptor.[1] Perhaps one's elder brother takes up the responsibility of the household, or the wife is spiritual[2] and very virtuous; or maybe one is not married and has not become entangled in household life. It comes about when there are situations such as these.

"A person was very ill in a man's house, in critical condition. Someone said, 'When it begins to rain when the Svati star is in the ascendant and the rainwater falls into a skull, and if a poisonous snake, while chasing a frog, pounces upon it and, in the process, the frog jumps away and the snake's poison falls into the skull, then if a medicine prepared with this poison is given to the patient, the patient can be cured.' Now, after astrological consultation on the right day, time, and conjunction of the stars, a member of the family of the patient set out with a yearning heart to look for the above conditions. He prayed to God in his heart: 'Lord, only if You let me procure all these will my objective be fulfilled.' Roaming around in this way, he actually saw a human skull, and then, in no time, a rain shower came. The man then said, 'Oh Lord, I have found the skull of a dead person, and it has also rained during the ascendancy of Svati, and the rainwater has also fallen into the skull. Now, Oh Lord, bestow Your grace and procure the rest of the articles.' He was reflecting with a longing heart when he saw a poisonous snake approach. The man was extremely happy. He was so excited that his heart began to thump. He said, 'Oh Lord, now the

1. Sadguru.
2. Vidya shakti.

snake has come and so many articles have been procured. Please get me the remaining articles too!' While he was praying thus, lo! there came a frog. And the snake began to chase it. As soon as it approached the skull to pounce on the frog, the frog jumped over the skull and and the snake's poison fell into the skull. The man then began to clap his hands and dance in joy.

"So, I say that anything can happen if one has the longing for it."

Chapter Four

Sannyas and the household – God-realization and renunciation – who is a real sannyasin?

Sri Ramakrishna: "Until you have completely renounced in the mind, you cannot attain God. A sadhu cannot accumulate things. 'The bird and the sadhu do not hoard.' Birds and wandering monks[1] do not store things for tomorrow. As for me, I can't even carry a clod of earth to clean my hands. I can't carry a betel-leaf in a bag. When Hriday was troubling me so much, I wanted to go to Kashi. I said to myself that I would be able to take a dhoti with me, but how could I carry money? So I didn't go to Kashi. (*Everybody laughs*.)

(*To Mahima*) "You householders have to have 'this' as well as 'that' – to live in the world and also to stick to the spiritual path."

Mahima: "Is it possible to have 'this' as well as 'that?'"

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1. Darvesh.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I threw money into the water on the bank of the Ganges near the panchavati, saying, 'Money and earth – earth is money, money is earth.' But then I became frightened. I said to myself, 'Have I offended Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth)? If Mother Lakshmi stops giving me food, what will happen to me?' Then I bargained like Hazra. I said, 'Mother, please dwell in my heart!' Once Mother Bhagavati, happy with a person's austerity, said to him, 'Ask for a boon.' He said, 'Mother, if you would grant me a boon, grant that I may eat rice on a gold plate with my grandson.' Thus in one boon he asked for everything – grandson, prosperity, and a gold plate! (*Everybody laughs*.)

"When you have renounced 'lust and greed' in the mind, it goes to God and becomes absorbed in Him. One who is now bound can also attain liberation. One is bound by turning away from God. When does the lower needle not point to the upper needle of the goldsmith's scale? The moment there is a load of 'lust and greed' in one of its pans.

"Why does an infant cry when it comes out of the womb? 'I was in the womb, in union with God.' After taking birth, it cries and asks, 'Where am I? Where have I come? I was meditating on God's lotus feet; now where am I?'

"For you [referring to householder devotees], mental renunciation is necessary. Live in your family without attachment."

Is it necessary to renounce the world?

Mahima: "When the mind has gone to Him, do you stay with the family any more?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What are you saying? Where will you go if you don't stay in the family? I clearly see that I am in Rama's Ayodhya wherever I am. Family life, this world, is Rama's Ayodhya. Having received spiritual instruction from his guru, Ramachandra said, 'I will renounce the world.' Dasharatha called Vasishtha to make Rama change his mind. Vasishtha saw that Rama had acquired deep dispassion. So he said, 'Rama, first reason this out with me; later you may renounce the world. Tell me, is this world without God? If that be so, you may renounce it.' Rama understood that God Himself has become the world, its creatures, everything. It is because of His power that one perceives everything as real. Ramachandra became silent then.

"You have to fight against lust, anger, and so on in worldly life; you have to fight against various desires. You have to fight against attachment. If the fight is from inside the fort, it is convenient. It is better to fight from home. There you get food, and your wife helps you in so many ways. In the Kaliyuga life depends on food. It is better to be at one place than to roam around for food from one place to another. Living at home is fighting from inside the fort.

"And you should live in the world like a torn-off leaf in a storm. The storm sometimes takes it inside a house, sometimes to a garbage heap. The leaf is carried away wherever the wind takes it,

sometimes to a clean place and sometimes to a dirty one. He has put you in the world; it is good that you stay there. Again, He may lift you from there and carry you to a better place. Let it happen as it will."

Resignation in family life – Rama's will

"What can you do if you are kept in the world? Resign, surrender everything to Him. Then there will be no trouble. You will then realize that it is He who does everything. All depends on Rama's will."

A devotee: "'Rama's will' – what is that story?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "There was a weaver in a village who was very religious. Everybody trusted him and loved him. The weaver would go to the market to sell his cloth. When a customer asked the price, he would say, 'By Rama's will, cotton thread costs one rupee; by Rama's will labour charges are four annas; by Rama's will, profit is two annas. So the price of the cloth by Rama's will is one rupee, six annas.' People had so much faith in him that they would immediately pay the price and take the cloth. This fellow was a great devotee. After dinner he would sit in the worship hall[1] till late at night, meditating on God and singing His glories. One night – it was very late but this fellow did not feel sleepy – he was sitting there smoking when a group of robbers[2] passed by to commit a robbery. They needed a porter. They came to the weaver and said, 'Come along with us.' They took him by the hand. Then they robbed a house and placed many articles

1. Chandi mandap; a roofed place, usually with the four sides open.
2. Dacoits.

on the weaver's head to carry. Just then the police arrived. The thieves ran away, but the weaver was caught with all those articles on his head. He was kept in the police lock-up that night. The next day he was tried by a magistrate. When the villagers came to know of it, they all came to the jail. They said, 'Sir, this fellow could never commit a robbery.' The magistrate said to the weaver, 'Tell me what happened.' The weaver replied, 'Sir, by Rama's will, I took rice at night. By Rama's will, I sat in the worship hall. By Rama's will, it was very late at night. By Rama's will, I was meditating on Him and was singing His glories when, by Rama's will, a group of thieves passed by. By Rama's will, they pulled me up and took me along with them. By Rama's will, they committed robbery in a house. By Rama's will, they placed a load on my head. Then by His will I was caught. By Rama's will, the police put me in jail. And now this morning, by Rama's will, I have been brought before you.'

"Seeing that the fellow was so religious, the magistrate discharged him. On the way home the weaver said to his friends, 'By Rama's will, I have been discharged.'

"Whether one is living in the world or has taken sannyas, all is Rama's will. So, resign yourself to His will and do your duties in the world.

"What else can you do?

"A clerk was sent to jail. When the period of his sentence ended, he was released from jail. Now, will he dance joyfully to the beat of the drum, or will he return to his job as a clerk?

"A person liberated in this very life,[1] may live as a householder if he so wills. For a man who has attained spiritual knowledge, there is nothing like 'here' and 'there.' It is all the same for him. Everything 'here' as well as 'there' belongs to Him."

The earlier story of his life – conversation with Keshab Sen – liberated in this very life in the world

"When I first met Keshab Sen at a garden house, I said, 'He has cast off his tail.' Everybody in the assembly laughed. Keshab said, 'Please don't laugh. His words have meaning. Let me ask him.' I said, 'As long as a frog doesn't shed its tail, it has to live in water. It can't climb onto dry land and move around. As soon as it loses its tail, it hops out onto the bank. Then it can live both in the water and on the land. Similarly, until a man sheds the tail of his ignorance, he lives in the water of worldliness. When he casts off the tail of ignorance and attains knowledge, he is liberated and can move about anywhere. If he likes, he can live as a householder.'"

Chapter Five

Context of household life – the unattached householder

Mahimacharan and other devotees are sitting and drinking the nectar of Sri Ramakrishna's words, which are like variously-coloured jewels. The devotees pick up as many as they can, but their laps are already full, so heavy that they cannot be lifted. Their capacity is limited; they can contain no more. Sri Ramakrishna is solving all the problems that have arisen in the human heart since the creation of the

1. Jivanmukta.

world. Padmalochan, Narayan Shastri, Gauri Pundit, Dayananda Saraswati, and other scholars of the scriptures sit in silent awe. When Dayananda saw Sri Ramakrishna in the state of samadhi, he lamented, "We have studied so much of the Vedas and the Vedanta, but in this great man we see its manifestation. He proves that the learned only drink buttermilk when they churn the scriptures. Only such great men as he eat the butter." Learned men like Keshab Chandra Sen, educated in English, are also amazed by Sri Ramakrishna. They think how wonderful it is that this illiterate person can explain such matters in rustic language, similar to the words of Jesus Christ. Thakur explains in the same way, by parables, so that all people – men, women, and children – can understand easily. Jesus repeated, 'Father, Father' like a madman. Sri Ramakrishna is mad, crying, 'Mother, Mother!' He has not merely an inexhaustible treasure of spiritual wisdom, but he also pours out endless pots of divine love. And he is a man of renunciation like Jesus. He has the same burning faith. That is why his words are so powerful. When worldly people talk, there is no power because they have no renunciation – no burning conviction in them. Learned men like Keshab Sen also wonder how this illiterate person has developed such broad-mindedness. How wonderful! There is no ill will in him at all. He respects followers of all religions and quarrels with no one.

Today, hearing Thakur's conversation with Mahimacharan, some of the devotees say to themselves, "Thakur hasn't asked anyone to renounce the world. On the contrary, he said that the household is like a fort; you can fight against lust, anger, and the like while staying in this fort." He also said, "Where else will you go if you don't live there? The clerk resumes clerkship when he is freed from jail." In a way he is saying that a person liberated in this life can live as a householder. Keshab Sen was his example. To Keshab he said, "You have shed your tail;

no one else has." But Thakur has said something very special, "You have to live from time to time in solitude. You have to build a fence around a young plant or it will be eaten by goats or cows. When the plant has grown a big trunk, you may remove the fence. Then even if an elephant is tied to it, the tree will not come to any harm. There is no danger if you live as a householder after having lived in solitude and after having attained spiritual knowledge and love for God." That is why he talked so much of living in solitude.

The devotees are reflecting thus. After talking about Keshab, Sri Ramakrishna speaks about one or two other devotees.

Devendranath Tagore – yoga and bhoga (commmunion with God and sense enjoyments)

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan and the others*): "I once went with Mathur Babu[1] to meet Devendra Tagore. I said to Mathur Babu, 'I have heard that Devendra Tagore meditates on God. I would like to see him.' Mathur Babu said, 'All right, sir, I will take you to see him. We were class fellows at the Hindu College. He has special affection for me.' After many days I had the opportunity of meeting him with Mathur Babu. Seeing Mathur Babu, Devendra said, 'You have changed a little. You have developed a paunch.' Mathur Babu introduced me, saying, 'He has come to meet you. He is mad for God.' To find out Devendra's traits, I said to him, 'Let me examine your body.' Devendra took off his shirt. He was fair, and his body was rough, as if sprinkled with vermilion.

1. Sejo Babu – Mathur Nath Biswas, Rani Rasmani's son-in-law. From the very beginning he served Sri Ramakrishna with extreme devotion, like a disciple.

"At first I noticed that there was some pride in him. And why not? He had so much wealth, so much learning, such name and fame. Noticing his pride, I asked Mathur Babu, 'Does pride come from knowledge or ignorance? Does a person who has attained the knowledge of Brahman have pride of learning, or of spiritual knowledge, or of wealth?'

"While talking to Devendra, I suddenly went into a state of mind when I can see what kind of person a man really is. A hearty laugh arose within me. When I am in this state of mind, I feel that the learned are just like pieces of straw. When I see that there is no discrimination and dispassion in a pundit, he appears to me just like a dry piece of straw. I then see him as a vulture flying high but with its eyes on charnel pits below.

"I saw that he had both yoga and bhoga.[1] He had many small children. The family doctor was there. This showed that, though he was man of knowledge, he was occupied with worldly affairs. I said, 'You are the "Janaka" of the Kaliyuga. Janaka held to both the world and spirit while he drank his cup of milk. You live with your family, keeping your mind on God. Hearing that, I have come to see you. Please talk to me about God.'

"He recited some portions from the Vedas. Then he said, 'This world is like a chandelier and every being is a lamp in it.' Once when I was meditating in the panchavati, I had a vision like that. It agreed with Devendra's words, so I thought he was really a great man. I asked him to explain further. He said,

1. Desire for enjoyment of sense objects.

'Who knows this world? God made men to proclaim His glory. If there is no light in the chandelier, it is dark everywhere. You can't even see the chandelier.'"

Incivility and the Brahmo Samaj –
Captain, a householder devotee

"After a long conversation Devendra said to me in a happy mood, 'You have to come to our celebrations.' I said, 'It is all God's will. You can see what the state of my mind is. I never know what state the Divine Mother will put me in.' Devendra said, 'No, no, you have to come. But please clothe yourself in a dhoti and upper cloth. I would be unhappy if somebody made a remark about how casually you dress.' I replied, 'I won't be able to do that. I can't become a gentleman.' Devendra and Mathur Babu both laughed.

"The very next day Mathur Babu received a note from Devendra asking me not to attend the festival. The reason? It would seem rude if I were not able to retain the upper cloth on my body. (*All laugh*.)

(*To Mahima*) "And then there is an another person, Captain.[1] Though a householder, he is a great devotee. You must talk to him.

"Captain knows the Vedas, the Vedanta, Srimad Bhagavata, the Gita, the Adhyatma Ramayana – all these by heart. Just talk to him and see for yourself.

"He has great devotion! He held his umbrella over my head when I was walking along the road

1. Vishwanath Upadhyaya, a resident of Nepal, was the emissary of the king of Nepal and his representative in Calcutta. He was a very orthodox brahmin and a great devotee.

from Baranagore. And how hospitable he is when he takes me to his house. He fans me, massages my feet, and serves me various kinds of vegetables. One day I lost consciousness in the toilet of his home. Even though he is so orthodox, he went into the room and helped me to sit. He is so orthodox, but he didn't feel any repulsion.

"Captain has to spend a lot. His brothers live in Kashi, and he sends money to them. His wife used to be miserly; now she is so hard-pressed with family expenses, she can't spend much on anything.

"Captain's wife told me that he doesn't like household life. She said once that he told her he would leave the world. Several times he said, 'I will leave, I will leave.'

"He comes from a family of devotees. His father was a soldier. It is said that with one hand he would worship Shiva and with the other, he would fight with a bare sword.

"Captain is very orthodox. He didn't come here for a month because I used to go see Keshab Sen. Why? Keshab Sen is not orthodox – he eats with the English, he has married his daughter into another caste, so he has lost his own caste. I said, 'What does all this matter to me? Keshab repeats the name of Lord Hari. I go for that reason. I go to him to hear talk about God. I eat plums, I am not concerned with thorns.' Even then Captain didn't leave me alone. He would say to me, 'Why do you go to Keshab Sen?' Feeling a little irritated, I said, 'I don't go to him for money! I go to him to hear of God! Why do you go to the Governor's house? He is

a mlechchha (non-Hindu). Why do you associate with him?' When I said this, he stopped for a while.

"But he has great love and devotion for God. During worship, he performs arati with camphor, and while he sits on the asana,[1] he sings hymns. At that time he is quite a different man, as if he is completely absorbed."

Chapter Six

The doctrine of maya in Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan*): "According to the Vedanta philosophy the world is all maya, all illusory like a dream. The Supreme Self[2] is the witness – the witness of the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. These conform to your way of thinking. The waking and dreaming states are equally true. Listen to a story. It agrees with your thinking.

"There was a peasant who lived in the countryside. He was a farmer, but spiritually he was very wise. After a long period, his wife bore him a son whom they named Haru. Both parents loved this boy. And why not? He was the precious, bright jewel of the family. The farmer was of a religious nature, and everybody in the village liked him very much. One day he was working on his farm when somebody came and told him that Haru had an attack of cholera. The farmer returned home and arranged for good medical treatment, but the boy died. Everybody in the family was grief-

1. Seat of worship and meditation.
2. Paramatman.

stricken, but the farmer acted as though nothing had happened. He even consoled others, saying that it was no use to grieve. And then he went back to his field to farm. When he returned home, he found that his wife was weeping even more bitterly. She said to him, 'How hard-hearted you are! You have not shed a tear for your son!' The farmer replied gently, 'I'll tell you why I'm not weeping. Yesterday I had a great dream. In it I was a king and the father of eight sons. I was in complete happiness when I woke up. Now I am in great confusion – whether I should grieve for those eight sons or for this one son of yours.'

"The farmer was a man of spiritual knowledge. He could see that the state of waking is as illusory as the state of dreaming. The Atman alone is eternal.

"I accept everything – the fourth state of turiya[1] as well as the states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. I accept all the three states. I accept Brahman as well as maya, living beings, and the world – all. If I did not accept all, I would not get the full weight."

A devotee: "How does it lose weight?" (*All laugh*.)

Sri Ramakrishna: "Brahman is qualified by living beings and the world. In the beginning, when discriminating 'not this, not this,' one has to determine what the individual soul is and what the world is. As long as one has the feeling of 'I-ness,' one feels that God Himself has become everything.

1. The transcendental state.

He indeed has become the twenty-four cosmic principles.

"When a man talks of the essence of a bel fruit, he means the pulp only – not its seeds and shell. But to be able to tell the weight of the bel fruit by simply weighing the pulp alone will not do. One has to take the pulp, the seeds, and the shell together to weigh it. The pulp, the seeds, and the shell all belong to it."

The Absolute belongs to Him and so does the phenomenal world

"So, I accept the Absolute as well as the phenomenal world. I don't do away with the world by calling it maya. If I did, it would lose weight."

The doctrine of maya and Vishishtadvaitavada – Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga

Mahimacharan: "Beautifully harmonized! From the Absolute to the phenomenal world, and again from the phenomenal world to the Absolute."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Men of knowledge see everything as an illusion. Devotees accept all the states. The man of knowledge yields milk in droplets. (*All laugh.*) Some cows are very choosy when they graze, so they yield milk in dribbles. But the cows who don't discriminate so much and eat everything give streams of milk. The highest class of devotee[1] accepts both the Absolute and the

1. The highest class devotee:
yo māṁ paśyati sarvatra sarvaṁ ca mayi paśyati ।
tasyāhaṁ na praṇaśyāmi sa ca me na praṇaśyati ।।
Bhagavad Gita 6:30. [He who sees Me everywhere and sees all in Me; I am not lost to him, nor is he lost to Me.]

phenomenal world, so he can enjoy the divine even when his mind comes down from the Absolute. The highest class of devotee yields milk in streams." (*All laugh*.)

Mahima: "But that milk has a particular smell." (*All laugh*.)

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Yes, it has. It has to be boiled a bit. You must heat it a little on the fire of spiritual knowledge. Then it won't smell anymore."

Om and the union of the Absolute and phenomenal

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahima*): "You explain Om with reference only to *a, u, m*."

Mahimacharan: "*A* for creation, *u* for preservation, and *m* for dissolution."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I explain it with the sound 't-a-a-m' of a brass bell – *t...a...m*. The merging of the relative[1] into the Absolute;[2] the merging of the gross, the subtle, and the causal into the Great Cause; it is the merging into the state of turiya from the states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. The bell rings as if something heavy has fallen into the ocean, giving rise to waves. The relative thus arises from the Absolute. The gross, the subtle, and the causal forms start appearing out of the Great Cause. The states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep emerge from turiya. And again, these waves of the Great Ocean lose themselves again in the Great Ocean. From the

1. Lila.
2. Nitya.

relative to the Absolute, and from the Absolute to the relative. I have been shown this. I use the simile of the sound 't-a-a-m.' I have seen all this clearly. I was shown the Ocean of Consciousness – it is limitless. Everything on the relative plane arises from it and then merges back into it. Millions of universes come into existence in the Ocean of Consciousness, and then they merge back into it. I don't know what your books say."

Mahima: "Those who saw all this have not written the scriptures. They remained absorbed in their realization. Where was the time for them to write? To be able to write, one needs an analytical mind. Others who heard it from them wrote."

How long does attachment to the world remain?
Till the attainment of the bliss of Brahman

Sri Ramakrishna: "Worldly people ask why they don't get rid of the attachment to 'lust and greed.' The attachment goes when God is attained.[1] If you once taste the bliss of Brahman, your mind will not run after sense pleasures, wealth, and honour.

"If a moth sees light once, it doesn't go into darkness again.

"Someone said to Ravana, 'You conjure up so many different forms for Sita. Why don't you once assume the form of Rama and go to her?' Ravana replied, 'When I think of Rama, even the seat of Brahma appears unimportant, what to speak of

1. rasavarjaṁ raso'pyasya paraṁ dṛṣṭvā nivartate। Bhagavad Gita 2:59. [The longing for sense objects also turns away when he has seen the Supreme.]

another man's wife. How then could I assume the form of Rama?'"[1]

The more one develops love for God, the less becomes the attachment to the world – Chaitanya's devotees are unattached

"All spiritual practices are done for the sake of attaining Him. The more you meditate on Him, the less will be your attachment for the ordinary things of the world. The more devotion you have for His lotus feet, the less desire you will have for sense objects, and the less your mind will concern itself with physical comfort. Someone else's wife will appear to you as your mother, and you will think of your own wife as your helper in spiritual life. She will be a friend in spiritual life. You will be freed from lower desires, and divine qualities will develop in you. You will be completely detached from the world. Then even if you live in the world, you will move about as one already liberated in life.[2] The devotees of Chaitanya Deva lived in the world without attachment."

Deep secret of the man of knowledge and the devotee

(*To Mahima*) "You may discuss Vedanta a thousand times with a genuine devotee and call the world a dream, but his love for God will not disappear – though he may appear to shed it a little for a while. A pestle was lying in a field of willows. It resulted in the pestle destroying the dynasty. [3]

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1. Tuchham Brahmapadam paravadhusangah kutah.
2. Jivanmukta.
3. Musalam kulanashnam, the story of the pestle: The childhood friends of Samba, one of Krishna's sons, playfully disguised him as a

"One becomes a man of knowledge who is born with an element of Shiva. His mind always goes to that knowledge 'only Brahman is real, the world is an illusion.' If one is born of Vishnu, one possesses loving devotion.[1] This intense love will never leave you. Even if it is diluted a little with reasoning, it returns to gush forth again, just as the pestle destroyed the dynasty of the Yadus."

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pregnant woman by dressing him in female clothes and hanging an iron pestle below his waist. They presented him before a group of ascetics and asked them what sort of child the woman would give birth to. Enraged that a joke had been played on them, the munis proclaimed a curse that the iron pestle would be the ruin of the entire clan of Yadus. Fearfully, the boys took the pestle to the ocean and rubbed it for a very long time. The particles that fell from it, on striking the ground, became strong willow reeds. The boys threw the last piece of pestle into the sea.

In the meantime Krishna's clan, the Yadus, had become overbearingly vain and arrogant and they began to fight among themselves. At last they took the powerful willow reeds sprung from the pestle dust and, with them as weapons, fought each other to the death. Krishna, having decided that it was time that he also pass on, bade his father and his wives farewell and seated himself under a tree for meditation. Only one of his legs was not obscured by the leafy and outreaching branches of the tree. A hunter mistook him for a deer and killed him with an arrow, the point of which was the last piece from the pestle that had been thrown into the sea. Thus did the munis' curse find fulfillment.

1. Prema bhakti.

Chapter Seven

Service to mother and Sri Ramakrishna – Hazra Mahashay[1]

Hazra is sitting on the verandah to the east of Sri Ramakrishna's room, performing japa. He is forty-six or forty-seven years old and comes from the same region as Thakur. For quite a long time he has felt renunciation for the world. He remains away from his home and visits it only occasionally, although he has property in the village, which supplies the needs of his wife, son, daughter, and other family members. But he has incurred a debt of about a thousand rupees, and it continually worries him how to pay it back He often visits Calcutta. Ishan Chandra Mukherji, who resides in Thanthania has great respect for Hazra and serves him like a holy man. Sri Ramakrishna keeps Hazra with him out of compassion. When his dhoti wears out, he gets Hazra a new one. He often enquires after him and talks about God with him. Hazra is very argumentative and is often carried away by his argument. He spends a lot of time on his asana on the verandah, performing japa on his rosary.

News has come of the illness of Hazra's mother. When Ramlal left their village, she held his hand and begged him, "Carry this humble request of mine to your uncle (Thakur), somehow to persuade Pratap (Hazra) to come home just this one time. May he come to see me just this once." Thakur has told Hazra, "Go home and see your mother, and then come back. She spoke about it repeatedly to Ramlal. How can one call upon God

1. Hazra (Pratap Chandra Hazra) left his wife and children in Madagod, near Kamarpukur, in order to lead a spiritual life, when he was approximately thirty-eight years old. Argumentative and critical of others, he nevertheless had extraordinary faith and devotion to Ramakrishna, who joked that he was there to "thicken the plot." He returned to his home and died there in the month of Chaitra, 1306 B.Y. (A.D. 1900) when he was sixty-four years old.

after hurting one's mother? Go, and then you may come back."

When the meeting of the devotees is over, Mahimacharan brings Hazra to Thakur. M. is also present.

Mahimacharan (*smiling, to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Sir, I have to ask you something. Why have you asked Hazra to go home when he doesn't want to go back to his family?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "His mother expressed great grief to Ramlal, so I told him, 'Go for three days. Come back after seeing her once.' Can one practice spiritual disciplines after hurting one's mother? I was going to stay in Vrindavan when all of a sudden I remembered my mother. I said to myself, 'Mother would weep.' So I returned here with Mathur Babu.

"Anyway, what fear can a man of knowledge have to go see his family?"

Mahimacharan (*smiling*): "But sir, only provided one has attained knowledge."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Hazra has attained everything. Only a little of his mind is in the world. He has sons and has incurred some debt. 'The aunt has completely recovered, only a bit of sickness remains.' (*Everybody laughs*.)

Mahima: "But sir, where is his knowledge?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "O brother, you don't know? Everybody knows that Hazra is the only devotee who lives in Rasmani's temple. They

talk of Hazra only. They never talk of this (*pointing to himself*)." (*All laugh*.)

Hazra: "You are unmatched. You can't be compared with anyone. No one understands you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah, so that is why – the matchless one cannot help anybody. Why, then, talk of this (*meaning himself*)?"

Mahimacharan: "Sir, what does he know? He'll just do what you tell him to."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Oh? You'd better ask him. He tells me, 'I have nothing to do with you.'"

Mahima: "He is very argumentative."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And then he also lectures me from time to time. (*All laugh*.) In a discussion I scolded him. Later, lying inside the mosquito net remembering the language I used, I thought I might have offended him. So I went to salute him. Only then was my mind at peace."

Vedanta and the pure Atman

(*To Hazra*) "Why do you call the pure Atman Ishvara (God)? The pure Atman is beyond all action. It is only a witness to the three states. When I think of creation, preservation, and dissolution I call Him Ishvara. What is pure Self like? It is like a magnet lying at a distance, but the needle still moves toward it. The magnet itself remains unmoved – actionless."

Chapter Eight

Evening music and conversation with Ishan

It is almost evening. Thakur is taking a stroll. Seeing Mani sitting all alone and meditating, he suddenly addresses him lovingly, "Please bring me one or two coarse shirts. I can't accept shirts brought by everybody. I was thinking of asking Captain, but you may give them to me." Getting up, Mani says, "At your service."

It is twilight. Incense is burnt in Sri Ramakrishna's room. He bows to the pictures of gods and goddesses and, having repeated his bija mantra,[1] chants the names of God. There is a unique splendour outside the room. It is the seventh day of the bright fortnight of the month of Kartik and the pure rays of the moon falling on the temple seem to make it smile. As well, ripples play on the surface of the Ganges, which is rising and falling sweetly like a sleeping baby's chest. The flood tide is over. The sound of arati mixed with a melodious murmuring of the bright and refreshing current of the Ganges loses itself in the distance. Three aratis are being performed at the same time in the temples – the Kali temple, the Vishnu temple, and each of the Shiva temples. The priest of the Shiva temples goes from one temple to the other. He holds a bell in his left hand and the lamp with five wicks[2] in the right. An attendant carries cymbals.

The sweet sound of the symphony of sanai and other instruments[3] from the southwest corner of the compound is heard. Evening music[4] is being played in

1. The letter or syllable of a mantra in which the essence of God is concentrated.
2. Panchapradip.
3. Roshan chowki.
4. Raga ragini.

the music pavilion.[1] A perpetual festival of the All-Blissful Mother reminds the devotees never to be unhappy. There are joys and sorrows in the world – let them be. The Mother of the Universe, our Mother, is here. Rejoice. The son of the maid of the house hasn't enough to eat, hasn't enough to wear, no house, no hearth. Even then, there is courage within: he has his mother. He is fearless in the lap of his mother. She is not a step-mother, She is the real mother. Who am I, from where have I come, what will happen to me, where will I go – all this the Mother knows. Why bother the mind about it? My Mother knows – my Mother who has made me a body, mind, life, and self. I don't even want to know. If it is necessary, She will tell me. Why worry about it so much? All children of Mother, rejoice!

Bathed in moonlight, the world outside is smiling. Inside his room, Sri Ramakrishna is seated, filled with the bliss of God's love. Ishan has come from Calcutta. More conversation about God takes place. Ishan has great faith. He says, "With a trident in his hand, Shiva[2] accompanies one who goes on a journey with the name of Durga on his lips. What is there to fear from misfortune when Shiva Himself is the guardian?"

Attainment of God through faith – instructions on Karma Yoga to Ishan

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "You have firm faith. I don't have that much. (*All laugh*.) One can realize Him by that faith alone."

Ishan: "Yes sir."

1. Nahabat khana.
2. Shulapani.

Sri Ramakrishna: "You perform repetition of the name[1] and daily puja, observe fasts, and perform purascharana[2] and other rites and rituals. This is very good. God makes one who has sincere attraction for Him do all these things. If one is able to perform them all without desire for their fruits, one surely attains Him."

Ritualistic devotion and loving devotion – when do rituals fall off?

"The scriptures instruct us to perform numerous rites, so I perform them. This is called ritualistic[3] devotion. The other is loving devotion.[4] It comes out of an especially deep love for God, such as Prahlada had. When one develops this love, there is no longer the need for rituals."

Chapter Nine

In the heart of the disciple

Before evening, Mani is strolling in the temple garden as he recalls the story of Rama's will. This is very beautiful, he thought. It solves the confusion between predestination and free will, between liberty and necessity. "I was captured by the robbers because of Rama's will; I was smoking, that too by Rama's will; I committed a theft by Rama's will; I was held by the police also by Rama's will. I have become a sadhu by Rama's will. I pray, 'O Lord, may my mind be not impure. May you not goad me to commit robbery.'" This too is Rama's will. The right desire and the

1. Japa.
2. Performance of japa a certain number of times each day, methodically increasing and decreasing the number.
3. Vaidhi bhakti.
4. Raga bhakti.

wrong desire are both given by Him. Even so, there is a special point: Why should He give us the wrong understanding? Why should He give the desire to commit robbery? In answer to this, Thakur said, "Just as He has made the lion, the tiger, and the snake among animals, just as He has made poisonous trees among others, similarly He has also made thieves among men." Why has He made them, who can tell? Who can understand God's ways?

But then, if God has made everything, our responsibility ends. But why would it end? Unless you have realized God, unless you have had His vision, you cannot have one hundred percent faith. As long as you don't have full faith, you will certainly have the feeling of vice and virtue, and the feeling of responsibility. Thakur has explained what "Rama's will" is. Repeating "Rama's will" like a parrot won't do. As long as you don't know God, as long as "my" will and His will don't become one, as long as you don't have the full understanding that I am an instrument, so long does He retain the knowledge of vice and virtue, joy and sorrow, purity and impurity, good and bad, and the sense of responsibility. Otherwise, how can His world of maya go on?

The more I think of Sri Ramakrishna's love of God, the more I am struck with wonder. Keshab Sen repeats the name of Hari and meditates on God, so he (Thakur) immediately runs to meet him. Keshab at once became his own. Then he did not listen to Captain's objection that Keshab went to a foreign land, ate with white men, gave his daughter in marriage into a different caste – all these things. "I take only cherries. I have nothing to do with thorns." In the bond of love for God, believers in God with form and believers in God without form are united. Hindus, Muslims, and Christians – all are united, and also the four castes. Love of God, be victorious! Blessed you are, Sri Ramakrishna! Victory to you! You have

embodied the universal spirit of eternal religion.[1] It is perhaps for this reason that you hold such attraction. You embrace the followers of all religions as your own, without any difference. You have but one test – love for God. You only see if a person has that within, if he has devotion. If that is there, he immediately becomes your very own. If you see love of God in a Hindu, he is at once your own. And if a Muslim has the same love for Allah, he is also your own. If a Christian has love for Jesus, he is also your near and dear one. You say that all rivers coming from different directions flow into one and the same ocean.

Thakur does not consider this world a dream. If that were so, it would lose weight. It is not the doctrine of illusion,[2] it is the doctrine of qualified non-dualism.[3] He does not consider the individual soul and the world imaginary; he doesn't think they are illusions. God is real, and so are men and the world real. Brahman is qualified by living beings and the world. You cannot get the whole of a bel fruit if you take away its seeds and shell.

It is said that the universe manifests itself in the Great Ocean of Consciousness[4] and then merges back into it in time. A wave rises in the Great Ocean and then merges back into it. On the waters of this ocean of joy are an infinite number of waves. Where is the beginning of this sport and where is its end! It cannot be expressed in words. It cannot be thought by the mind. How little is man, how small his intelligence. It is said that great saints have seen this Eternal Supreme Person in the state of samadhi – they have witnessed the Absolute sporting as the ever-playful Lord. This they have surely done because Sri Ramakrishna also says so – but not with these physical eyes. They did it perhaps with what is called

1. Sanatana Dharma.
2. Mayavada.
3. Vishishtadvaita.
4. Mahachidakasha.

the divine eye. Getting this divine eye, Arjuna saw the Universal Form of the Lord. With this divine eye, the rishis realized the Atman, and with this divine eye, Jesus saw his heavenly Father constantly. How can we gain that divine eye? We have heard Thakur say that one can get it by the yearning of the heart. But how to have such yearning**?** Does one have to renounce the world? No, he did not say that today.

Section XIV

Sri Ramakrishna's Arrival at a Devotee's House

Conversation and Joy with Narendra, Girish, Balaram, Chunilal, Latu, M., Narayan, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

In the company of devotees in a devotee's house

It is the 10th day of the dark fortnight of Phalgun, Purva Ashadha nakshatra, Wednesday, 11 March 1885, the 29th of Phalgun. Arriving from Dakshineswar today at about ten o'clock, Sri Ramakrishna takes the prasad of Sri Jagannath at the home of a devotee, Balaram Bose. Latu and other devotees are with him.

Blessed you are, Balaram! Today your home has become the main centre of Thakur's work. He has bound devotee after devotee with the ties of divine love! How he has danced and sung with them, just as Sri Gauranga himself had established a mart of ecstatic love in the house of Srivasa![1]

Sitting at the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, Thakur weeps with longing to see his intimate disciples. He suffers sleepless nights. He says to the Divine Mother, "Mother, he has so much devotion! Please attract him to this place. Mother, do please bring him here. If he

1. An intimate devotee of Sri Chaitanya.

cannot come here, then Mother, take me to him so that I can see him." So he comes running to Balaram's house. To others he says, "Sri Jagannath is worshiped in Balaram's house. The food there is very pure." Whenever he comes, he immediately sends Balaram to invite others. He says, "Please invite Narendra, Bhavanath, and Rakhal. Please invite Purna, the Younger Naren, Narayan – all these devotees. Feeding them is like feeding Narayana Himself. They are not ordinary. They are manifestations of divinity. You will be greatly benefited if you feed them."

It was in Balaram's house that Thakur first met Girish Ghosh. A joyous singing of hymns was held here at the time of the Car Festival.[1] So many times "a festivity of joy in the court of love" has been held at this very place.

Eagerly awaiting your arrival – the Younger Naren

M. teaches in a nearby school. He has come to know that Sri Ramakrishna will come to Balaram's house today at ten o'clock. He finds time to go there during school hours and arrives in the afternoon and salutes Sri Ramakrishna. After his meal Sri Ramakrishna rests for a while in the visitor's room. Every now and then he takes out some powdered spices and cubeb[2] from a small pouch and chews it. Young devotees are sitting around him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately*): "So you have come. Don't you have school?"

M.: "I'm coming from school. There's not much to do there now."

A devotee: "No sir, he has played truant." (*All laugh.*)

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1. Rathayatra.
2. A small, spicy berry from a plant in the pepper family.

M. (*to himself*): "Oh, it is as if someone has dragged me here."

Sri Ramakrishna looks a bit worried. Then he asks M. to sit near him and speaks with him on various subjects. He says, "Can you wring this hand towel of mine and spread my shirt in the sun? My foot is aching a little. Can you massage it gently?" M. doesn't know how to render service, so Thakur teaches him. Rather confused, M. performs these actions one by one. While Sri Ramakrishna instructs him in different things during the conversation, M. gently strokes his feet.

Sri Ramakrishna and the highest point of renunciation – the true sannyasin

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Can you tell me why this has been happening to me? For some time now I haven't been able to touch anything made of metal. Once I put my hand on a metal cup and it felt like I'd been stung by a horned fish. My whole hand began to sting. But you know, you can't get along without touching a wash pot, so I thought I'd cover it with a piece of cloth and see if I could pick it up. No sooner did my hand touch it than it started to twitch with acute pain. So I prayed to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, I won't do it again, please pardon me this time.'

"The Younger Naren comes here. Will his family object? He is very pure and absolutely free from lust."

M.: "He is a 'receptacle' of great capacity."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. He also says that he remembers everything he hears about God, even if

he only hears it once. He tells me that when he was a child he used to weep because he couldn't see God."

Sri Ramakrishna talks to M. about the Younger Naren for quite some time. One of the devotees present says, "Master Mahashay, aren't you going back to school?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What time is it?"

A devotee: "Ten to one."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "You had better go. It's getting late. You have already left your work to come here. (*To Latu*) Where is Rakhal?"

Latu: "He has gone home."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Without seeing me?"

Chapter Two

In the afternoon with devotees – incarnation and Sri Ramakrishna

Returning after school has closed, M. sees Thakur seated with a group of devotees in Balaram's drawing room. There is a sweet smile on his face, which is reflected on the faces of the devotees. Seeing that M. has come again and, after he has offered his salutations, Thakur beckons him to sit near. Girish Ghosh, Suresh Mitra, Balaram, Latu, Chunilal, and some other devotees are present.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "Talk to Narendra and see what his views are."

Girish (*smiling*): "Narendra says that God is infinite. All that we see and hear, whether it is a person or a thing – even what we can't describe – is part of Him. What can a portion of infinity be? Infinity can't be split."

Sri Ramakrishna: "God may be infinite, but if He wills, His essence can manifest in man – and it does. That He incarnates Himself cannot be explained by any analogy. One has to experience it. One has to see it himself. Analogy may give some idea. If you touch the horn of a cow, you have touched the cow. And if you touch its foot or tail, you have still touched the cow. But for us the principal thing is the cow's milk, and that comes from the udder.

"In the same way, God assumes a human body from time to time and appears on earth to teach us ecstatic love and devotion."[1]

Girish: "Narendra says, 'Is it possible to comprehend Him completely? He is Infinite.'"

Perception of the Infinite[2]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "Who can comprehend God fully? One can not know any aspect of God, either the whole or a part. And what need is there to know Him fully? It is enough to have a vision of God. Seeing His incarnation is seeing Him. If somebody goes to the Ganges and touches its water and says, 'I have seen and

1. Prema and bhakti.
2. Compare discussion about the order of perception of the Infinite and of the Finite in Max Muller's Hibbert Lectures and Gifford Lectures.

touched the Ganges,' it doesn't mean that he had to touch the whole of the Ganges from Hardwar to Gangasagar with his hand. (*All laugh*.)

"If I touch your feet, I have touched you. (*Laughter*.)

"If you go to the sea and just touch its water, you have touched the sea itself. The element of fire is present in everything, but it is more present in wood."

Girish (*laughing*): "I want the place where I can get fire."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "The element of fire is more in wood. If you are looking for the essence of God, you have to find it in man. God is more manifest in man. If you see deep and burning devotion[1] and ecstatic love[2] pouring forth from a man, if you see him mad for God, crazy in His love, know for certain that God has manifested in him.

(*Looking at M.*) "God is indeed present, but then His power manifests more in some than in others. His power manifests more in an incarnation. Sometimes this power exists in its fullness. It is Shakti[3] that becomes the incarnation of God**.**"

Girish: "Narendra says, 'He is beyond word and intellect.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, He may be beyond this mind, but He is known by the pure mind. He may be beyond this intellect, but He is seen with the

1. Urjita bhakti.
2. Prema bhakti.
3. The power of God.

pure intellect. As soon as one is freed from the attachment to 'lust and greed,' the mind and intellect become pure. Then pure mind and pure intellect are one. He is known by the pure mind. Haven't the sages seen Him? They saw Consciousness with the help of consciousness."

Girish (*smiling*): "I defeated Narendra in the argument."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No. He said to me, 'Girish Ghosh has so much faith in God's incarnation, what could I say? One shouldn't contradict such faith.'"

Girish (*smiling*): "We are all so free with our words, but M. is sitting tongue-tied. What is he thinking? Sir, what do you say?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Mukhahalsa bhetarbunde, kantulse, dighal ghomta nari, pana pukerer sheetal jala manda kari.[1]" (*All laugh*.)

(*Smiling*) "But he is not like that. He is a very deep soul." (*All laugh*.)

Girish: "Sir, what does this saying mean?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Beware of these kinds of people. The mukhahalsa, whose words flow like water. And then the bhetarbunde, who keeps the door of his heart closed to you. Then the kantulse, who shows off his devotion by sticking a sacred tulasi leaf in his ear. Beware also of a dighal ghomta woman, a woman who wears a long veil. People think she is very chaste, when in fact she is not. And of panapukur water – water from a scum-

1. Sri Ramakrishna explains this verse below.

covered tank. When you bathe in it, you get typhoid fever." (*Laughter*.)

Chunilal: "People have been talking about M. The Younger Naren and Baburam are his pupils, and so are Narayan, Paltu, Purna, and Tejchandra. It is being said that he has brought them here, and thus their studies are being neglected. He is being blamed."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Who will believe them?"

Such is the trend of conversation. Now Narayan comes in and salutes Thakur. Narayan is a student, of fair complexion, seventeen or eighteen years old. Sri Ramakrishna is very fond of him and is always eager to see and feed him. He often cries for him in Dakshineswar. He sees in Narayan the very presence of Narayana Himself

Girish (*to Narayan*): "Who told you? I see that it is M. himself who has shot this arrow." (*Everybody laughs*.)

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "Stop, keep quiet! M. is already getting a bad name!"

Amazing is the worry over food – result of a brahmin's acceptance of gifts

The conversation again turns to Narendra.

A devotee: "Why doesn't he come as often as he used to?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Worry over food is amazing! It made even Kalidasa lose his wits."

Balaram: "He often visits Annada Guha, Shiva Guha's son."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. Narendra, Annada Guha, all these boys hold meetings of the Brahmo Samaj at the house of an office clerk."

A devotee: "His name is Tarapada."

Balaram (*laughing*): "The brahmins say that Annada Guha is very conceited."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Don't listen to the brahmins in such matters. You know them well. If you don't give them gifts, you are bad; and if you do, you are good. I know Annada. He's a good man."

Chapter Three

Enjoying hymns in the company of devotees

Sri Ramakrishna expresses a desire to hear some songs. The drawing room in Balaram's house is full of people. They are all looking at him (Sri Ramakrishna) to see what he says and what he does.

Tarapada sings:

O Keshava,[1] who roam in Vrindavan's groves, to Your humble servant grant Your grace.

O Madhava,[2] who enchant the mind and steal the heart, playing sweetly on the flute.

(Utter, my mind, the name of Hari! Hari! Hari!)

O youth of Vrindavan, who tamed the serpent-king Kaliya and removed the fear of the distressed,

O You of flashing eyes, a peacock's feather on Your brow, the delight of Radha's heart,

1. An epithet of Krishna, meaning "one with beautiful, long hair."
2. An epithet of Krishna, the descendant of Madhu.

Upholder of the mount Govardhan, with wildflowers adorned!

O Damodara,[1] crusher of Kamsa's pride!

O dark-hued playmate of Vrindavan's gopis!

(Utter, my mind, the name of Hari! Hari! Hari!)

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "Oh, what a beautiful song! Did you compose all these songs?"

A devotee: "Yes, he composed all the songs in *Chaitanya Lila* ('Lord Chaitanya's Divine Play')."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "This song describes it so well!"

(*To the singer*) "Can you sing a song about Nitai?"

Tarapada sings a song by Nitai:

If you wish for young Radha's love, come here: the tide of love flows in.

A hundred waves of love are rising.

Take as much as you desire

Of this love the maiden pours out freely.

Drawn by her love, chant "Hari, Hari, Hari!"

This love sets the heart dancing, maddened with longing.

Come, let us all chant Hari's name, drawn by Radha's love.

Next he sings the song about Sri Gauranga:

Who are you, O golden-hued one, who set my heart at peace?

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1. An epithet given to Krishna because his foster-mother tried to tie him up with a rope (*dama*) around his belly (*udara*).

A storm is raging on the sea of love, sweeping away all fetters of family, birth, and pride.

(Drown, O mind, in the thought of Gaur.)

Becoming a cowherd boy, you tended the cows in Vraja,

Stealing the hearts of the gopis with the sweet flute in your hand.

Lifting Mount Govardhan, you saved Vrindavan,

And your serene face was flooded with tears

As you humbled yourself, holding the wounded gopis' feet.

(Drown, O mind, in the thought of Gaur.)

Everyone tries to persuade M. to sing, but he is shy. In a whisper he asks to be excused.

Girish (*smiling, to Thakur*): "Sir, there is no way to make M. sing."

Sri Ramakrishna (*irritated*): "He can bare his teeth at school, but feels shy to sing a song here!"

M. is ashamed and sits silently.

Suresh Mitra is seated at some distance. Glancing lovingly at him and pointing at Girish Ghosh, Sri Ramakrishna says happily: "What are you compared to him (Girish)!"

Suresh: "Yes, sir. He is my elder brother." (*All laugh*.)

Girish (*to Thakur*): "Well, sir, I didn't study anything in my childhood. Still people call me learned."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Mahima Chakravarty has read and heard so many scriptures! He is a good 'receptacle'. (*To M.*) What do you think?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

Girish: "What? Studying! I have seen enough of it. I'm not going to be misled by it anymore."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "Do you know the attitude 'here'?[1] Books, scriptures, and the like only show the way to realize God. When you know the way, the means, what need is there for books and scriptures? One only has to act.

"A person received a letter asking him to send a few things to his relatives. It listed what articles were to be sent. When he went to buy them, he couldn't find the letter. He was very confused and began to look for it. For a long time people helped him search, and at last the letter was found. There was no end to his happiness. He carefully held the letter and began to read it, eagerly, to see what was written in it. It said, 'Send five seers of sandesh, a dhoti, and what-not.' Now the letter was of no use to him. He put it away and began to gather the sandesh, dhoti, and other articles. For how long was the letter needed? As long as he didn't know about the sandesh, dhoti, and so forth. When he knew what it contained, he followed its instructions.

"In the scriptures you will find ways to realize God, but after knowing them, you have to get to work. Then only will you attain the goal.

"What use is mere learning? A pundit may know a number of couplets, a number of scriptures. But he who is attached to the world, who has love for

1. Sri Ramakrishna used the pronoun 'I' very rarely. He referred to himself saying 'here,' 'this place,' and similar words.

'lust and greed' in his mind, has not internalized the contents of the holy books. His study has been in vain. The almanac says that it will rain twenty *adas*, but squeeze the almanac and not a drop will come out. Not a single drop!" (*All laugh*.)

Girish (*smiling*): "Sir, will not a drop fall when the almanac is pressed?" (*All laugh*.)

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "The pundits talk grandly, but where is their attention? On 'lust and greed,' on sensual pleasures and money.

"Vultures soar high, but their eyes remain fixed on the charnel pits. (*All laugh*.) Their looks are only on charnel pits, dead animals, and corpses.

(*To Girish*) "Narendra is a very good boy. He is good at singing, at playing musical instruments, at reading and writing, and at studies. Besides, he has conquered his senses: he has discrimination and dispassion. He is truthful. He has a number of good qualities.

(*To M*.) "What do you think? Is he very good?"

M.: "Yes sir, he is very good."

Sri Ramakrishna (*aside to M*.): "See how much love and faith Girish has!"

M. looks at Girish wonderingly. Girish has been coming to Thakur for some time. M. feels as though they have known each other for a long time, that they are very close, like gems strung together on the same thread.

Narayan: "Sir, won't you sing?"

Sri Ramakrishna sings the name and glory of the Divine Mother in his sweet voice:

Cherish the beloved Mother Shyama in your heart.

O mind, may you and I alone behold Her, and let no one else intrude. …

Thakur sings to the Divine Mother, assuming the state of worldly people burned by the three fires complaining like a fretful child.

O Mother, ever blissful as You are,

Deprive me not of bliss.

My mind knows nothing but Your lotus feet.

The king of Death berates me.

Tell me, Mother, what I should say to him.

My one desire is to cross the sea of this world

With Your name, Bhavani, on my lips.

I did not even dream, O Mother,

That you would drown me in this shoreless sea!

I swim night and day taking Durga's name,

Yet to my sorrow there is no end.

If I die this time, O Beloved of Shiva, O Durga,

Nobody will ever repeat Your name!

Then he sings of the Divine Mother ever joyful in the bliss of Brahman:

In Shiva's company the Mother is ever lost in ecstasy;

Though drunk with the wine of bliss, She reels but does not fall.

She stands erect on Shiva's breast, the world trembling at Her tread.

More than mad, both He and She are indifferent to fear and shame.

The devotees listen to the songs in deep silence. They gaze at Thakur, who, in an amazing self-forgetful mood, is intoxicated with love for God.

The song ends. After a while Sri Ramakrishna says, "I could not sing well today. I have a slight cold."

Chapter Four

At the approach of evening

Evening has slowly set in, as if the blue shadows of infinity have fallen on the ocean's breast. Whether in a deep forest or on the peak of a mountain reaching into the sky, at the bank of a river with its water trembling at the touch of wind, or in a vast plain meeting the ends of the earth, the insignificant human being easily feels a change of mood. The sun was illuminating the universe. Where has it gone? wonders a child – and, as well, the childlike saint. It is evening. How amazing! Who has done this? Birds sheltered in the branches of the trees are chirping, men who are spiritually awake are repeating the name of the Supreme Poet, the Primal Being, the Cause of all causes.

Evening has come as they talk. The devotees remain seated while Sri Ramakrishna chants the sweet names of God. Everybody listens to him attentively. They have never heard such sweet chanting, as though a shower of nectar. They have never heard or seen a child calling his mother so lovingly, "Mother, Mother!" What need is there now to gaze at the sky or the hills, the ocean, open spaces, or the forest? What use is there now of seeing the horns or feet or limbs of a cow? Am I seeing with my eyes, here in this very room, "the udders of the cow," which the compassionate guru has spoken of? How peaceful has every restless mind become! How has this joyless

earth become so filled with joy? Why do I see the devotees so at peace, so joyful? Is this loving saint the infinite God in a beautiful form? Is this the place where one's thirst for milk is quenched? Whether or not he is God-incarnate, my heart is sold at the feet of this man and it cannot be withdrawn. I have made him the pole-star of my life. Let me see how the Primeval Supreme Soul reflects Himself in the lake of the heart!

Some of the devotees reflect in this way and feel blessed to hear the names of the Mother and the Lord being chanted from the holy lips of Sri Ramakrishna. After singing the names and glories of God, Thakur prays. It is as if the Lord Himself has assumed a body of love and is instructing the individual soul how to pray. He says:

Mother, I surrender at Your lotus feet, I give myself to You.

I do not seek creature comforts, nor name and fame do I ask,

Nor do I demand the eight occult powers. O Mother,

Only grant that I may have pure love and devotion at Your lotus feet,

That for You I may have pure love, both selfless and without motive.

And grant, O Mother, that by Your world-bewitching maya I be not enchanted.

Never may I have love for 'lust and greed.'

In Your world of maya, there is none else for me but You.

I know not how to chant Your name, O Mother,

I am poor in love, devotion, and knowledge.

Be compassionate and grant me love for Your lotus feet.

Mani thinks: What is worship for him who repeats the name of God at morning, midday, and evening; from

whose holy lips issue forth the Ganges of names ceaselessly, like a flow of oil? Mani later understands that Thakur has assumed a human body to impart instructions to mankind: The Lord Himself came in the guise of a yogi and sang the glory of the name.

Girish has invited Thakur to his home this very evening.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Don't you think it will be too late?"

Girish: "No, you may go whenever you like. I have to go to the theatre tonight. I have to settle a dispute."

Chapter Five

Sri Ramakrishna in a wonderful mood on the road

At Girish's invitation, Thakur is to go tonight. It is 9:00 P.M., and he still has to eat the dinner that Balaram has prepared for him. So that Balaram won't feel hurt later, Thakur tells him on the way to Girish's house, "Balaram, you may send the food you prepared."

As he comes down from the second floor, he becomes filled with divine emotion. He looks drunk. Narayan and M. are with him. Rama, Chuni, and many others follow. A devotee asks, "Who will go with him?" Sri Ramakrishna says, "One person will do." As he descends the stairs, he is overwhelmed with ecstasy. Narayan tries to hold his hand to keep him from falling, but Thakur expresses displeasure. Shortly, he says to Narayan with great

tenderness, "If you hold my hand, people will think I'm intoxicated. I will walk by myself."

They cross a three-way juncture of Bosepara Lane. Girish's house is only a little distance from here. Why is Sri Ramakrishna walking so fast? The devotees are falling behind. Who knows what divine emotion has taken possession of him? Is he walking like a madman thinking of that Being whom the Vedas say is "beyond mind and speech?" Only a short time ago he said at Balaram's house that the Supreme Being is not beyond mind and speech, that He is realized by the pure mind, the pure intellect, and the pure soul. Perhaps at this moment he is beholding that Supreme Being. Is he seeing "whatever is, it is You?"

Just then Narendra is seen coming. Thakur is usually excited, almost to madness, at the sight of Narendra. But now as Narendra appears before him, Thakur is silent. People say, "This is God-consciousness." Did Chaitanya Deva experience this same state?

Who can understand such divine fervour? Thakur has now arrived at the street from which one enters Girish's house. The devotees are with him. He talks to Narendra.

"Are you keeping well, my child? I couldn't speak to you then." His every word is marked with tenderness. He has not yet reached the front door. He suddenly stops.

He looks at Narendra and says, "One word – 'this' (individual soul) is one and 'that' (the world) is another."

The individual soul and the world! Was he seeing all this in ecstasy? Only he knows what he saw in that speechless state. He spoke a word or two – a phrase from the Vedas – as if a word from God, or as if he has gone to the infinite seashore and, standing there

speechless, hears a few echoes of the anahata[1] rising from never-ending waves.

Chapter Six

Thakur in the shrine of a devotee – newspapers – Nityagopal

Girish stands at the door to greet Sri Ramakrishna. As soon as Thakur and his devotees approach, Girish lies prostrate before him. He rises at Sri Ramakrishna's bidding, takes the dust of his feet, and leads him to the sitting room on the second floor. He asks him to sit there, and the devotees quickly sit down. Everyone is eager to be near him and to drink his sweet words.

As he sits down, Thakur notices a newspaper lying there. Newspapers have to do with worldly-minded men, worldly matters, gossip, and running down others, so a newspaper is unholy to Sri Ramakrishna. He makes a sign that it should be removed.

When the newspaper is taken away, he sits. Nityagopal salutes him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Nityagopal*): "Why have you not been to Dakshineswar?"

Nitya: "Sir, I haven't gone to Dakshineswar, because I haven't been well. I had pain."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How are you now?"

Nitya: "I am still not well."

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1. The Anahata sound is produced on its own without two material objects being struck together; hence, it is called "the unstruck sound."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You'd better bring your mind down one or two notes."

Nitya: "I don't like people's company. They say so many things that frighten me. But at other times I feel strong."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's only natural. Who lives with you?"

Nitya: "Tarak.[1] He's always with me. But at times even he bothers me."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Nangta (Totapuri) used to say that there was a person at his monastery who had acquired some miraculous powers. He used to walk around gazing at the sky. But when his companion, Ganesh Garji, left him, he became disconsolate."

While speaking, Sri Ramakrishna goes into ecstasy. In that mood he remains speechless. After a while he says, "You have come? I'm here too."

Who understands these words? Is this the language of the gods?

Chapter Seven

With an intimate disciple – discussion on God-incarnation

Many devotees are sitting near Sri Ramakrishna, among them Narendra, Girish, Rama, Haripada, Chuni, Balaram, and M.

Narendra does not believe that God incarnates in a human body. On the other hand, Girish has

1. Taraknath Ghoshal, later Swami Shivananda.

burning faith that God incarnates in every age, that He assumes a human body and comes down to this mortal world. Thakur wants the two to argue this matter. He says to Girish, "Discuss this for a while in English. I want to listen."

The discussion starts. But not in English – in Bengali with a few words of English interspersed. Narendra says, "God is infinite. It is not possible for us to comprehend Him. He is present within everybody, it is not that He appears in only one human body."

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately*): "I agree with him. He is everywhere. But this is also true, that there is a difference in manifestation of the divine power. He manifests Himself in some as ignorance[1] and in some as knowledge.[2] In some 'receptacles' there is greater power, and in others less. So all men are not equal."

Ram: "What is the use of such idle discussion?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*sharply*): "No, no. It has a special significance."

Girish (*to Narendra*): "How do you know that He doesn't assume a human body?"

Narendra: "He is beyond speech and mind."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, He can be known by the pure intellect. The pure intellect and pure Atman are indeed the same. The rishis realized the pure Atman with their pure intellect."

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1. Avidya shakti.
2. Vidya shakti.

Girish (*to Narendra*): "If God does not incarnate in a human body, who will teach mankind? He assumes a human body to teach knowledge and love for God. If he doesn't, who will?"

Narendra: "Why, He will teach from within the heart!"

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately*): "Yes, yes. He will teach as our Inner Controller."[1]

Now a heated discussion begins: Can the Infinite have parts? What does Hamilton say? What does Herbert Spencer say? What have Tyndall and Huxley said? This is the discussion.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "I don't like such conversation. I see everything as God. What is there to reason about? I see that He is all, that He has become everything. He is this as well as that. In one state the mind and the intellect are lost in the Absolute. When I see Narendra, my mind is absorbed in the Absolute.

(*To Girish*) "What do you say to this? Say something."

Girish (*laughing*): "I have understood nearly everything but this." (*Everybody laughs.*)

Ramanuja and the doctrine of Qualified Non-dualism

Sri Ramakrishna: "And then I can't talk unless I come down two steps. What Shankara understood and taught as Vedanta is true, but then the Qualified Non-dualism[2] of Ramanuja is also true."

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1. Antaryamin.
2. Vishishtadvaita.

Narendra: "What is meant by Qualified Non-dualism?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "Qualified Non-dualism is Ramanuja's view that the finite soul and the phenomenal world are parts of the Absolute and not separate from it. The three are one.

"Take a bel fruit. Somebody separates its shell, seeds, and kernel, but now you want to know its weight. Will you be able to weigh it by weighing the kernel alone? The shell, the seeds, and the kernel will have to be weighed together. At first it seems that neither the shell nor the seeds are of any importance – that the kernel is all-important. But when you think about it, you realize that the kernel belongs to the same substance (fruit) as the shell and the seeds. In the beginning you have to reason 'not this, not this'; the finite soul is not permanent, nor is the world: only Brahman is real, all else is unreal. Later, you realize that the kernel belongs to the same substance as the shell and seed. The Absolute is the identical substance from which you derive the concept of the individual soul and the world. The phenomenal must be traced to that very Being, the Absolute must be traced. So Ramanuja says that the individual soul, the world, and Brahman are one. This is called Vishishtadvaita."

Chapter Eight

God-vision – God reveals Himself through the Incarnation

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "I see Him before my eyes; what more should I reason about? I'm seeing that God Himself has become everything, that He Himself has become the living beings and the world.

"But without awakening the consciousness within you, you can't realize the Universal Consciousness. How long do you reason? As long as you do not realize Him. Mere talking will not do. I see that He indeed has become everything. One can only gain awakening by His grace. When you awaken, you go into samadhi. Sometimes you forget your body; your attachment to 'lust and greed' vanishes; you don't like anything except talk about God; you feel pained to hear worldly talk."

Revelation – instruction to Narendra – Kali truly is Brahman

"When the consciousness within is awakened, the Universal Consciousness is realized."

At the end of the discussion Sri Ramakrishna says to M., "I have seen that you can know Him in one way through reasoning and in another way through meditation. Again, when God reveals Himself by showing how He plays as man, it is yet a different experience. When He reveals what God-incarnation is, you don't have to reason any more, and nobody has to try to make you understand. Do you know what it's like? It's like striking a match and the place is suddenly illumined. Similarly, if

God suddenly gives you light, all doubts vanish. Can He be known by reasoning?"

Thakur calls Narendra and makes him sit near him. He enquires about him and shows great affection to him.

Narendra (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Alas, I have meditated on Kali for three or four days, but nothing at all has happened."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It will happen gradually. Kali is none other than Brahman. The One who is Brahman is Kali. Kali is the Primal Power. When It is inactive, I call it Brahman. When It creates, preserves, and dissolves, I call It Shakti, I call It Kali. Whom you call Brahman,[1] I call Kali.[2]

"Brahman and Kali are one and the same. They are like fire and its burning power. If one thinks of fire, its burning power immediately comes to mind. When one accepts Kali, one has to accept Brahman. Similarly, by accepting Brahman, one has to accept Kali.

"Brahman and Shakti are one and the same. I call Brahman Shakti, and the same Being I call Kali."

It is dark, and Girish must leave. He says to Haripada, "Brother, please call a cab. I have to go to the theatre."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "Look here, see that you bring one!"

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1. The Unconditioned, the Absolute.
2. God in relation to the conditioned.

Haripada (*laughing*): "I'm going to bring it. Why shouldn't I?"

God-realization and work – Rama and work

Girish (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "I have to leave you to go to the theatre."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, you have to serve both parties. King Janaka was loyal to both matter and spirit and drank his milk from a full cup." (*All laugh.*)

Girish: "I am thinking of leaving the theatre and everything to the younger fellows."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, no. This is all very good. It's helping many."

Narendra (*in a low voice*): "Just a moment ago he was harping on God, on incarnation of God, and now the theatre is drawing him!"

Chapter Nine

In samadhi – Sri Ramakrishna intoxicated with God

Seating Narendra by his side, Sri Ramakrishna looks at him. Suddenly he moves still nearer. Narendra does not believe in incarnations of God. What does that matter? Thakur's love for him knows no bounds. Touching Narendra, he quotes from a song, "'Do you feel that your dignity has been wounded? So be it. We are of the same mind as you, and we feel for you.'[1]

1. These words were addressed by the gopis of Vrindavan to Radha.

One reasons till one realizes God

(*To Narendra*) "As long as there is reasoning, one cannot attain God. You were reasoning. I didn't like it.

"How long is there noise at a feast? As long as people don't sit down to eat. As soon as luchis and vegetables are served, seventy-five percent of the noise disappears. (*All laugh*.) When other dishes are served, it decreases further. When curds are served on leaf plates, one can only hear the sound of sipping. And when the feast is over, they all sleep.

"The nearer you come to God, the less you reason. When He is attained, no words, no reasoning, remains. Then it is sleep – samadhi."

Saying this, Thakur gently strokes Narendra's body and touches his chin. He says, "Hari Om, Hari Om, Hari Om."

> Why is he acting like this? Is Sri Ramakrishna seeing in Narendra the very presence of God? Is this what is known as seeing God in man? Soon Thakur begins to lose outer consciousness, all awareness of the outside world. Perhaps this is what is called the "half-consciousness" that Chaitanya experienced. He has his hand on Narendra's feet, as if he is massaging the feet of Narayan. Again he moves his hand. Why so much caressing of the body and massaging of the feet? Is he serving the Lord, or is he transmitting power to Narendra?

Suddenly his mood changes. What is he saying to Narendra with folded hands? He says, "Sing a song and I will be restored. Then I'll be able to

stand on my own legs. 'Oh, he (my Nityananda) is intoxicated with the love of Gauranga.'"

He is silent for a while and sits speechless, like a figure in a painting. Then overwhelmed with divine emotion, he says, "Beware Radha, lest you fall into the Jamuna, you who are mad with love for Krishna!"

Still overwhelmed with divine emotion, he quotes a song:

Friend, how far is that wood

Where my Shyama Sundara is?

I sense Krishna here!

I can walk no farther.

Now Thakur has lost all consciousness of the world and remembers nothing. Narendra is seated before him, but he is not conscious of Narendra. He has no awareness of the outside world. It is as if his mind and soul have merged in God. *Madgat antaratma.*[1]

"Deeply drunk with the love of Gaur!" Saying this, he stands up with a cry.[2] He sits down again and says: "Yonder a light approaches. I see it but do not know from where it comes."

Now Narendra sings:

By giving Your vision, you have rid me of all sorrows and charmed my soul.

Beholding You, all the seven worlds forget their grief,
What to speak of my poor self so mean and unworthy.

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1. madgatenāntarātmanā, "His inmost self merged in Me." – Bhagavad Gita 6:47.
2. Humkar.

Sri Ramakrishna is losing all consciousness of the external world as he listens to the song. With eyes closed and body still, he goes into samadhi.

Just as a child who has lost his companion is confused; in the same way, after coming out of samadhi, he says, "Who will take me back?"

It is late at night, the tenth day of the dark fortnight of Phalgun. It is very dark when Thakur prepares to return to the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar. As he is about to get into a carriage, devotees stand nearby. Sri Ramakrishna gets in, helped gently by the devotees. He still remains in a God-intoxicated state.

The carriage leaves and the devotees go, each to his own home.

Chapter Ten

In the heart of the disciple

Overhead shines the starry night sky; upon the canvas of the heart is the wonderful image of Sri Ramakrishna, and in the memory the assembly of devotees. Like a happy dream, the mind's eye is filled with that love. The devotees are going home along the main road in Calcutta. Some of them, enjoying the pleasant spring breeze, sing the same song as they go: "By giving Your vision, You have rid me of all sorrows and have charmed my soul."

Mani walks along, wondering to himself: Does God actually assume a human form and come to earth? Is divine incarnation really true? How does the infinite God become a man three and a half cubits tall? Can the Infinite become finite? I have reasoned enough, but what have I understood? I have known nothing by reasoning.

Sri Ramakrishna has said beautifully, "As long as one argues and reasons, one does not attain the goal, one does not attain God." This is also true: I have only an ounce of intellect. How can I know God with it? Can a one-seer pot contain four seers of milk? But then again, how can one have faith in incarnation? Thakur said, "If God in His mercy shows Himself to you, it is understood in a moment." Goethe, lying on his deathbed, said, "Light! More light!" If God in His compassion strikes a light and shows it to you, then all doubts vanish, the way the illiterate fishermen of Palestine recognized Jesus, or devotees like Srivasa recognized Gauranga as the perfect God-incarnate.

And if God does not reveal Himself by His grace, what can be done? Sri Ramakrishna has said it; I shall put my faith in the incarnation of God. He himself has taught, "Faith, faith, faith! Faith in the words of the guru."

I have made You the pole-star of my life, never shall I lose my way in this sea of the world.

By God's grace I have developed faith in his words. I shall continue to believe what he says. Let others do what they like. Why should I give up such faith, faith that is rare even among gods? I now set aside all reason. Have I to become another Faust with intellectual discussions?

In the deep darkness of the night, a ray of the moon enters the window and Faust is lying alone in the room. "Alas, I have not been able to understand anything. The study of philosophy and science have served me in vain. Shame on me!" Saying this, will I then, like him, take up a vial of poison to commit suicide? Or else, like another person, Alastor, not being able to bare the burden of ignorance, shall I place my head upon a rock and wait for death? No, I need not try to fathom this mystery with an ounce of intelligence like all these tragic savants. There is no need to commit suicide because a vessel of one seer is

not able to contain four seers of milk. A wonderful counsel – "Faith in the words of the guru." Oh God, give me that faith, and let me not wander from here to there for nothing. That which is not bound to happen, don't send me out to find. And what Thakur has instructed, "May I gain pure love and devotion at Your lotus feet – love without alloy and love for God that wells up unbidden out of the depths of the immortal soul.[1] And may I not be enchanted by Your world-bewitching maya." Bless me with this, I pray.

Reflecting over Sri Ramakrishna's incomparable love, Mani returns home by the main road on that dark night. He says to himself, "What love he has for Girish! Even when Girish has to go to the theatre, he visits his house. Not only that, he doesn't even ask him to renounce – to forsake home, relatives, worldly activities, all, for him – and embrace sannyas. I understand; it has a meaning. Unless the time is ripe, unless one has developed deep dispassion, renunciation will be painful. Thakur himself says that if you remove the scab from a wound before the wound is healed, it will bleed and be painful. But when the wound has healed, the scab will fall off by itself. Ordinary men who have no insight ask you to renounce the world immediately. This sadguru (real preceptor), this sea of motiveless grace, is the ocean of love. Day and night he cares only to do good to mankind.

And also what faith Girish has! It was just two days after he had seen Thakur that he said, "Lord, you are God indeed. You have come in a human body for my salvation." Girish is right in saying, "How can God instruct like a member of the family without taking up a human body?" Who can make us realize that only God is real and all else unreal? Who can lift the weak child, having fallen on the ground, by holding his hand? Who can make a man attached to "lust and

1. Amla and ahetuki bhakti.

greed" and of the nature of an animal eligible for eternal life? And if He does not live with them as a human being, how will they, whose inmost Self is one with Him who does not want anything but God, spend their lives? That is why:

paritrāṇāya sādhūnāṁ vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām ।
dharmasaṁsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge ।।

[For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of dharma, I take birth in age after age.]

– Bhagavad Gita 4:8

What love! He is mad for Narendra, weeps for Narayan. He says, "These and the other young men – Rakhal, Bhavanath, Purna, Baburam, and the rest – are Narayana (God) Himself. They have come to earth in a human body for my sake." I say, this love is not born of human intellect. I see it as divine love. These boys are pure souls who have not touched women with carnal intentions. They have not developed greed, pride, envy, and the like by engaging in worldly activities. So there is greater manifestation of God in them. But who has such vision! Thakur has the insight. He sees everything: who is attached to the world, who is simple, who is magnanimous, who is a devotee of God. He serves such devotees as the Lord Himself. He helps them wash, puts them to bed, weeps to see them, and rushes to Calcutta for them. He beseeches others to bring them by cab from Calcutta. He often asks householder devotees, "Invite them to a meal. This will do you good." Is it worldly love, or pure, divine love? One worships God in an earthen image, serving Him with the sixteen articles. Can't He, then, be worshipped in a pure human body? Besides, they are helpers of the Lord in His every divine sport! They are His intimate companions in every incarnation.

As he gazes at Narendra, he forgets the external world; then gradually he forgets the embodied Narendra. He forgets the apparent man and sees only the real man. His mind merges into Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, seeing which he sometimes becomes mute and motionless and sometimes mutters, "Om, Om," or repeats, "Mother, Mother" like a child. He sees more of His manifestation in Narendra. He is mad repeating, "Narendra, Narendra."

Narendra does not believe in God incarnating as man. But what does that matter? Thakur has divine sight. He has seen that it is the pride of personality in him. God is very much our own. He is our own Mother, not an adopted one. Why does He not make us understand? Why does He not strike a light in compassion and show the Reality? Perhaps that is why Thakur said: "Do you feel that your dignity has been wounded? Be it so. We are of the same mind as you, and we feel for you."[1]

If one cannot be difficult with one's dearest of the dear, with whom can one be so? Blessed are you, Narendranath. This supreme person has so much love for you! Seeing you, he becomes inspired by God so easily.'

Reflecting thus, with Sri Ramakrishna in their minds, the devotees return home in the deep of night.

1. These were the words addressed by her companions, the gopis of Vrindavan, to Radha, the greatest lover of God-incarnate Sri Krishna.

Section XV

Sri Ramakrishna's Joyous Conversations with Ishan, Doctor Sarkar, Girish, and Other Devotees at the House in Shyampukur

Chapter One

On the householder way of life

It is the fourteenth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Aswin. Celebrations of the three-day worship of Mahamaya[1] on the seventh, eighth, and ninth days are over. The tenth day is Vijaya day. Greetings for this occasion are already over. Sri Ramakrishna is staying with some devotees in the Shyampukur area of Calcutta. He is suffering from a serious disease, cancer of the throat. The Ayurvedic physician, Ganga Prasad, treated him when he stayed at Balaram's house. At that time Thakur asked whether or not his disease was curable. The physician did not reply; he remained silent. Allopathic doctors also hinted that the disease was not curable. Doctor Sarkar is now treating him.

Today is Thursday, 22 October 1885. A bed has been set up in a room on the second floor of the two-storied house in Shyampukur. Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the bed, while Doctor Sarkar, Ishan Chandra Mukhopadhyay, and some other devotees sit in front and around him. Ishan is a very charitable person. Though he lives on a pension, he gives in charity. He is always contemplating God. After hearing of Sri Ramakrishna's illness, he has come to see him.

1. Durga Puja.

Though Doctor Sarkar comes only to treat him, he stays for six or seven hours. He has great love and reverence for Sri Ramakrishna and looks upon the devotees as his very own.

It is about 7:00 p.m. on a moonlit night. It seems as if the full moon, the lord of the night, is raining nectar. Inside, a lamp is lit. Many people have come to be with this great man. They all watch him intently, anxious to hear what he says and see what he does. Looking at Ishan, Sri Ramakrishna addresses him.

Unattached worldly man – the way to be unattached

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "Blessed is the worldly man who attends to his duties in life but has love and devotion for God's lotus feet. He is indeed brave. He is like a man carrying a two-maund load on his head, who watches a bridal procession passing by. The man has a heavy load on his head, yet he sees the bridegroom. Without great power of mind, it is not possible. He is just like a mud fish living in the mud – not a speck of mud soils its body. Or like a waterfowl that is forever diving into water – no water clings to its body when it flutters its wings even once.

"To be able to live unattached in the world, some spiritual practice is necessary. You have to live in solitude for some days – a year, six months, three months – and meditate on God. You must pray to Him earnestly to grant you love and devotion. And you should say to yourself, There is no one in this world who is my own. Those whom I call mine are so for just two days. Only God is my own. He alone is my all. Oh! how can I attain Him?

"You can live in the world after acquiring love and devotion for God. It is like smearing your hands with oil before cutting open a jackfruit. Then its milky sap won't stick to your hands. The world is like water and man's mind is like milk. If you keep milk in water, the milk and water become one. That is why one has to curdle milk in a quiet corner. When the milk is curdled, you can extract butter from it. And this butter, when placed in water, does not dissolve in it, but floats on the surface unattached.

"Some members of the Brahmo Samaj said to me, 'Sir, we have the attitude of King Janaka. We will attend to worldly affairs in an unattached manner like he did.' I said, 'It is very difficult to attend to worldly affairs in an unattached way. You do not become King Janaka just by saying so. King Janaka practiced austerities for a long time, standing on his head with his feet up.' You won't have to stand on your heads, but you do have to practice spiritual disciplines. And you have to live in solitude. When you have gained knowledge and love for God in solitude, then you may go and live in the world. Curds can only be set in a solitary corner. If you disturb the milk, it won't curdle.

"Janaka was unattached. That is why he is known by the name Videha, which means he had no consciousness of the body. Though he lived in the world, he moved around in it like one liberated in this very life.[1] But to be rid of body-

1. Jivanmukta.

consciousness requires spiritual progress. It needs a lot of spiritual practice.

"Janaka was a great hero. He wielded two swords – one of spiritual knowledge and the other of work."

Spiritual knowledge of the householder and of the sannyasin

"If you ask whether there is a difference between the knowledge of a householder and a sannyasin, the answer is that both are the same. The former is a man of knowledge, and so is the latter – just the same. But there is some risk for a householder living in the midst of 'lust and greed.' Living in a sooty room, you cannot escape a little stain, however clever you may be.

"Once you have churned the butter from the milk, if you keep it in a new earthen pot, it runs no risk of spoiling. But if you keep it in a pot of buttermilk, it is risky. (*All laugh*.)

"When parched rice is roasted, a few grains jump out of the frying pan, making the sound 'pat-pat.' They are like a jasmine flower that has no stain. Parched rice in the pot is also good, but not pure white like the flower; the grains have a little stain on them. When either a householder or a sannyasin gains spiritual knowledge, he becomes stainless, just like a jasmine flower. But after gaining spiritual knowledge, if he lives in the frying pan of the world, there may be a little red stain on his body. (*Everybody laughs*.)

"Once a bhairavi[1] went to the court of King Janaka. Seeing a woman, Janaka lowered his head and cast his eyes down. Seeing this, the ascetic said, 'Oh Janaka, you are still afraid of a woman!' When one has attained the highest spiritual knowledge,[2] one's nature becomes that of a five-year-old child. Then one no longer distinguishes between a man and a woman.

"So there may be a stain on the body of a person of knowledge who lives in the world, but this stain does no harm. The moon has stains – they don't obstruct the moonlight."

Work after spiritual knowledge – for the welfare of humanity

"Some people take up teaching mankind after attaining knowledge – for example Janaka, Narada, and others. One must have spiritual power to teach mankind. The rishis attained knowledge for themselves. But religious teachers like Narada moved about for the good of mankind. They were heroes.

"When a bird sits on an old, dry piece of wood floating on water, it sinks. But when a heavy log floats on water, it can carry a cow, a man, and even an elephant across. A steamboat goes across with many passengers.

"Teachers such as Narada and others are like heavy logs of wood, or like steamboats.

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1. Female ascetic.
2. Purna jnana.

"Some people eat, wipe their mouths with a hand towel, and sit down quietly lest others should know that they have eaten. (*All laugh*.) Another, having got a mango, cuts it into pieces to share with others.

"Narada and such religious teachers lived for the welfare of others, even after attaining spiritual knowledge."

Chapter Two

The Religion for the Age – Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga

The doctor: "When one has attained knowledge, one becomes speechless. The eyes are closed and tears flow. Then one needs love and devotion."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Bhakti is a woman. So she has access to the inner apartments. Jnana can only go to the visitor's room." (*Everybody laughs*.)

Doctor: "But all women aren't permitted in the inner apartments. Prostitutes can't go there. So knowledge is needed."

Sri Ramakrishna: "If a man doesn't know the right path but has love for God within and wants to know Him, such a person attains God by sheer love and devotion for Him. A great devotee set out to have the darshan of Lord Jagannath. He didn't know the way to Puri. Instead of going south, he went west. He lost his way, so he enquired earnestly from others. They told him, 'Not this way, go that way.' This devotee at last arrived at Puri and had the darshan of Lord Jagannath. Just see, even if you don't know the way, somebody will tell you."

The doctor: "But he did lose his way."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, he did, but in the end he reached his goal."

Somebody asks: "Is God with form or without form?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He is with form and also without form. A sannyasin went to Jagannath. After seeing the image, a doubt arose in his mind as to whether God is with form or without form. He had a stick in his hand. He began to feel around with it to see if it touched Jagannath's body. First he moved it from one side to the other and did not feel the image. So he understood that there was no image of the deity before him. But when he moved the stick in the opposite direction, it touched the deity's body. The sannyasin then understood that God is with form as well as without form.

"But it is very difficult to understand this. How can He who is without form be with form at the same time? This doubt does come to mind. Again, if He is with form, why then are there so many forms?"

Doctor: "He who has created forms is Himself with form. He also created the mind, so He is formless. He can be everything."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Without realizing God, one can't understand all this. For the aspirant, God manifests Himself in many forms, in many ways. Somebody had a tub for dyeing. Many people used to visit him to get their clothes dyed. The dyer would ask, 'Which colour do you want?' One perhaps says, 'I want it dyed red.' The dyer

immediately put it in his tub. Having dyed it, he says, 'Here is your cloth dyed red.' Maybe another says, 'I want it dyed yellow.' Dipping the cloth immediately in the same tub, the dyer says, 'Here is your yellow cloth. Take it.' When asked to dye it blue, he again dips the cloth in the same tub and says the same, 'Here is your cloth dyed blue.' In this way he dyed everybody's cloths, dipping them in the same tub. There was a person watching this strange affair. The owner of the tub asked him, 'How about you, brother? What colour do you want?' The man answered, 'Brother, please give me the colour of the dye in your vat.' (*Everybody laughs*.)

"Somebody went to defecate [in a forest]. There he saw a beautiful creature on a tree. When he came back, he said to someone, 'Brother, I saw a red-coloured creature on that tree over there.' That person said, 'I've seen it too, but it's not red; it's green.' Yet another person said, 'No, no. It's not green; it's yellow.' Others also spoke out, one saying it was violet, another blue, another black, and so on. This led to a quarrel. Then they all went to the tree. There was a man sitting there, and, when asked, he said, 'I live under this tree, and I know this particular creature very well. You are all speaking the truth. It is sometimes red, sometimes green, sometimes yellow, sometimes blue – so many colours. And at times I see that it has no colour at all.'

"Only a person who constantly thinks of God can know His real nature. Only he knows that God reveals Himself in various forms. He is seen in different ways. He has attributes, and then He is without attributes. Only he who lives under the

tree knows that this ever-changing creature has different colours, and at times no colour at all. The others only quarrel and trouble themselves.

"He is with form and He is formless. Do you know what He is like? Imagine an ocean of boundless Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. With the cooling effect of devotion, the water of this ocean freezes at places into icebergs. In other words, God takes a concrete form for the devotee, sometimes with a body. And when the sun of knowledge rises, the ice melts."

Doctor: "When the sun rises, ice melts into water. But then, you know, water turns into formless vapour."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That is to say, when one realizes that the Absolute is the only reality and the world an illusion, one attains samadhi, and all forms vanish. Then one is not aware of Him as a person. What He is cannot be put into words. Who would speak of it? He who is to speak does not exist. His 'I' cannot be found even if you search for it. Then the Absolute is without attributes, and one has only an inner experience.[1] Brahman cannot be known through the mind and the intellect.

"So it is said that bhakti, love of God, is the light of the moon and jnana is the sun. I hear that in the north, as well as the south, there are oceans where it is so cold in certain places that water freezes into ice. A ship is unable to sail there."

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1. Bodhebodhe.

Doctor: "Then one comes across obstacles on the path of bhakti."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, that is true. But it doesn't do any harm. It is that very water of the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda that freezes into ice. And there is no harm if you want to reason further by saying that Brahman is real while the world is an illusion. In that case the ice will melt by the heat of the sun of jnana. Then what remains is the same ocean of Sat-chit-ananda."

The ripe 'I' and the unripe 'I' – the 'I' of a devotee and the I' of a child

"When you have reasoned it out and attained samadhi, your 'I' vanishes. But this is very difficult. The 'I' never wants to disappear – and since it doesn't, you have to return to this world again.

"The bullock bellows, 'Hamba, hamba' ('I, I'). There is so much misery for it. The whole day, in rain or sunshine, it pulls a plough. Or it is slaughtered by a butcher. Even that is not the end. A tanner tans the leather and shoes are made from it. Last of all, strings are made from its intestines. When it falls into the hands of a carder and says, 'Tuhun, tuhun' (you, you), only then is it released.

"When one says, 'Naham, naham, naham' ('not I, not I, not I'), I am nothing, O Lord. I am the servant; You are the Master,' it is only then that he is released, he is liberated."

Doctor: "But one must fall into the hands of a carder." (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: "If 'I' simply refuses to go, let the rascal remain as the 'servant I.' (*All laugh*.)

"Some people retain their ego even after attaining samadhi, as the 'servant I,' the 'devotee I.' Shankaracharya retained the 'I of knowledge' to teach people. The 'servant I,' the 'devotee I,' the 'I of knowledge' are all the 'ripe I.' What is the 'unripe I?' 'I am the doer, I am the son of such a big man, I am so learned, I am wealthy, how dare you talk to me in this way?' – such kinds of attitudes. If somebody steals into a man's house and is caught, first of all the stolen articles are snatched from him. Then, after the man gives the thief a good beating, he hands him over to the police, saying, 'Don't you know who you are robbing?'

"After you have realized God, your nature becomes that of a five-year-old child. The 'I of a child' and the 'ripe 'I.' A child is not subject to the three gunas – it is beyond them. He is not subject to any one of the gunas – sattva, rajas, or tamas. See how a child is not governed by tamas. He may quarrel and fight with somebody now, but the next minute he puts his arm around him, shows him love, and plays with him. He is also not under the influence of rajas. He makes a toy house with so much effort! But soon afterward he leaves it and runs to his mother. He may wander around wearing a pretty cloth, but the next moment he lets it falls off into the dust. He may forget the cloth completely, or he may wander around with it under his armpit! (*Laughter*.)

"If you say to this boy, 'You have a pretty cloth, whose is it?' He replies, 'It's mine. My father gave it

to me.' If you say to him, 'Dear one, give me your cloth,' he replies, 'No, I won't give it to you! It's mine. My daddy gave it to me.' Later, if you can cajole him by giving him a doll or a flute, he may give you his five-rupee cloth and leave. A five-year-old child is also not attached to sattva. He is so fond of his neighborhood companions that he can't bear to be separated from them for even a moment. But when he goes away with his parents, he makes new friends and showers all his love on them. He forgets his old companions altogether. And then he has no pride of caste. If his mother has told him that so-and-so is his elder brother, he accepts him as his real brother one-hundred percent. If he is the son of a brahmin, and the other the son of a potter, he will eat with him from the same plate. And then also he has no idea of purity or impurity. He may eat without having washed his bottom after defecating. And he has no sense of shame: he may ask somebody if he has had full evacuation!

"And then there is the ego of an old man. (*The doctor laughs*.) Old people have a number of bonds[1] such as caste, pride, shame, contempt, fear, worldliness, calculation, and deceit. If he has any grudge or ill will toward someone, he can't get rid of it easily – perhaps even as long as he is alive. And then there are pride of learning and the pride of wealth. An old man's 'I' is an 'unripe I.'"

1. The Tantric scriptures list eight bonds or fetters: shame (lajja), hatred or contempt (ghrana), fear (bhaya), pride of caste, rank or race (jati), hesitation or suspicion (shanka), secretiveness (jugupsa), pride of family, ancestry, or lineage (kula), and pride of good conduct, character or piety (shila).

Who cannot gain spiritual knowledge?

(*To the doctor*) "A few people cannot gain spiritual wisdom. People who have the 'I of learning,' the 'I of knowledge,' and the 'I of wealth' do not attain spiritual knowledge. If you tell these people that there is a nice holy man at a certain place and ask them if they would like to visit him, they immediately offer a number of excuses and say they can't go. They think to themselves, I am such a big man. Why should I go?"

The three gunas – sattva leads one to God – the way to discipline the senses

"The nature of tamas is pride. It comes from ignorance.

"The Puranas say that Ravana had more rajas, Kumbhakaran more tamas, and Bibhishana more sattva. This is why Bibhishana could attain Ramachandra. Anger is another characteristic of tamas. In anger one loses the sense of right and wrong. Hanuman set fire to Lanka without thinking that fire could destroy Sita's cottage too.

"Then there is another characteristic of tamas – lust. Girindra Ghosh of Pathuraghat said, 'You can't get rid of enemies like lust and anger, so change their direction.' Desire God. Have intercourse with Sat-chit-ananda. And if you can't get rid of anger, bring the tamas of bhakti: 'What! I have repeated the name of Durga, shall I not be liberated? There is no sin for me, no bondage.' Thereafter, be greedy for God-realization. Fall in love with God's beauty and say, 'I am the servant of God. I am His son.' If you have to be proud, be

proud of this. You can turn the directions of the six enemies[1] this way."

Doctor: "It is very difficult to control the senses. You have to put blinders on both sides of a horse's head. In some cases, you may have to cover both eyes completely.

Sri Ramakrishna: "There is no fear if He bestows His grace once, if the Lord grants you His vision, if you realize the Atman once. Then the six passions can do no harm.

"Ever-perfect saints like Narada and Prahlada don't have to put blinders over their eyes."

Doctor: "But it's not good for a father to hold his boy's hand."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's not true. Spiritually advanced people have the nature of a child. Before God they are childlike; their egos vanish. They derive all their strength from God. It is the strength of the Father – nothing is their own. This is their firm conviction."

The path of reason and the path of joy –
Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga

Doctor: "Will a horse move forward unless you put blinders on the sides of its eyes? Unless the enemy[2] is subjugated, can one realize God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What you are saying is called the path of reason, Jnana Yoga. You can realize God this way too. Jnanis say that you must first

1. Lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride and envy.
2. Doctor Sarkar is referring to passions.

purify your consciousness. Spiritual disciplines are needed first, then you can attain knowledge.

"You can attain Him by the path of devotion too. If you once develop love for the lotus feet of God, if you begin to enjoy chanting His name and glories, you don't have to try to control your passions any more. They are subjugated automatically.

"Can a person who loses his son quarrel with anybody on that day? Or can he enjoy a feast? Can he walk around with his head high and enjoy sense pleasures?

"If a moth sees light once, can it then live in darkness?"

Doctor (*smiling*): "No, it does not. Instead, it rushes into the flame, and it perishes there."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, the devotee doesn't burn himself to death like a moth. It is the light of a jewel toward which the devotee rushes. The light of a jewel may be very bright, but it is cool and comforting. This light doesn't burn the body, but creates peace and joy."

Jnana Yoga is very difficult

"You can attain Him by the path of reasoning, by the path of Jnana Yoga. But this path is very difficult. 'I am not the body, or the mind, or the intellect; I am neither disease, nor sorrow, nor restlessness. I am the Self of Sat-chit-ananda, beyond pleasure and pain, not subject to the senses.' It is very easy to say all this in words, but it is very difficult to practice, to make it a part of your being. Your hand is scratched by thorns. It is

bleeding profusely, yet you say, 'Where? My hand is not scratched by thorns! I am all right.' To say this, you first have to burn the thorns in the fire of knowledge."

Knowledge and book learning – Thakur's system of education

"Many people think that without reading books, they can't learn, they can't attain knowledge. But it is better to listen than to read, and it is better to see than to listen. There is a great difference between hearing of Kashi and visiting Kashi.

"And then, a person who plays chess doesn't see his move clearly, while the onlookers can see much better and can suggest moves to the player. Worldly people think they're very intelligent, but they are attached to the world. They are playing the game, so they can't understand their moves well. Holy people who have renounced the world are unattached to worldly things and are more knowledgeable than worldly people. Since they don't play the game themselves, they can tell the moves better from outside."

Doctor (*to the devotees, indicating Sri Ramakrishna*): "He couldn't have gained so much knowledge by reading books. Faraday communed with nature, so he was able to discover great scientific truths. He couldn't have attained all this by knowledge derived from reading books. Mathematical formulae only throw the brain into confusion. They are a great obstacle to original inquiry."

Divine wisdom and book learning

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "When I used to lie on the ground in the panchavati, I would call on the Divine Mother, 'Mother, please show me what the karmis (ritualists) have achieved through their rituals, the yogis through yoga, and the jnanis through reasoning.' I used to say much more. How to tell you all that!

"Oh, what a state I passed through! Sleep was lost to me."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna sings:

I've shaken off my sleep; how can I fall into slumber again? For I am wide awake in the sleeplessness of union.

O Divine Mother, made one with You at last, my slumber I have lulled asleep for evermore.

"I have read no books. But you see, I repeat the Divine Mother's name, so they all show me respect. Sambhu Mallick said to me: Here is Santiram Singh quite able to beat anybody even though he carries no sword or shield." (*All laugh*.)

Now the talk turns to Girish Chandra Ghosh's play, *Buddha Charita*. He had invited the doctor to see the play, and the doctor enjoyed it very much.

Doctor (*to Girish*): "You are a very bad man! Shall I have to visit the theatre every day?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "What is he saying? I don't understand."

M.: "He liked the play very much."

Chapter Three

Conversation about divine incarnation – an incarnation of God and an ordinary soul

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "You haven't said anything. This man (the doctor) doesn't believe in divine incarnation."

Ishan: "Sir, I can't argue any more. I don't like arguments."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why? Why not speak out about what is right?"

Ishan (*to the doctor*): "Because of our ego, we people have little faith. Kak Bhushundi, the crow, didn't accept Ramachandra as an incarnation of God in the beginning. At last, after it had wandered through the regions of the moon and the gods and had gone to Kailash, it saw that there was no way to free itself from Rama. And so it surrendered itself, taking shelter in him. Rama then took it in his hand and swallowed it. Bhushundi saw that, even though it was still perched on its tree. Pride having left it, it understood that, though outwardly Ramachandra was a human being like others, yet he had the whole universe in his belly – the sky, the moon, the stars, the sun, the planets, the ocean, hills, men, beasts, trees and so on. All these were inside his belly."

Limited powers of the conditioned

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "It is very difficult to understand that He is both limitless and limited. The Absolute belongs to the same Being as the phenomenal world. How can we force ourselves

with our little intelligence to say that He can't become a man? Can our little intelligence realize all these things? Can a one-seer pail contain four seers of milk?

"So you have to put your faith in the words of those holy men and great souls who have realized God. They contemplate God constantly, just as a lawyer remains involved with his lawsuit. Can you believe in the words of Kak Bhushundi?"

Doctor: "I have faith in what I think is right. And once I have faith, I don't doubt. But how can I call Rama an incarnation of God? First, take the murder of Vali. Rama killed him with his arrow and hid himself like a thief. This is how a man acts, not God."

Girish Ghosh: "Sir, only God could do such a thing."

Doctor: "And then remember his forsaking of Sita."

Girish: "Sir, this too could be done by God, not by man."

Science, or the words of saints

Ishan (*to the doctor*): "Why don't you believe in the incarnation of God? You yourself have just said that He who has created forms has form, and He who has created the mind is without form. You have just said that anything is possible for God."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "That God can incarnate in a human form is not mentioned in his science. So how can he believe it? (*All laugh*.)

"Listen to this story. Somebody said, 'Brother, I have just been to a place where I saw a house fall down with a terrible crash.' The listener was an English-educated person. He said, 'Wait a minute. Let me see if it's in the newspaper.' He didn't find news of a house falling in the paper, so he said, 'I say, brother, I don't believe you. It isn't in the newspaper, so it isn't true.'" (*All laugh*.)

Girish (*to the doctor*): "You will have to accept Sri Krishna as God. I won't allow you to look on Him as a man. You will have to call him either God or a demon."

Simplicity of heart and faith in God

Sri Ramakrishna: "Unless you are simple at heart, you can't have faith in God easily. God is very far from a person having a worldly intellect. A worldly intellect creates doubts, and different kinds of pride appear – the pride of learning, the pride of wealth, and so on. But he (the doctor) is simple at heart."

Girish (*to the doctor*): "Sir, what is your opinion? Can a deceitful person ever attain spiritual knowledge?"

Doctor: "Oh Lord! Could he ever gain knowledge?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "How simple Keshab Sen was! One day when he came to the Kali Temple, he saw the guesthouse. He asked – it was four o'clock – 'When are the guests and the poor going to be fed?'

"The more faith you have, the more spiritual knowledge you will gain. A cow which is choosy in

fodder doesn't give much milk. But the cow that gobbles anything you give it – vegetable leaves and skin, straw – yields streams of milk. (*Everybody laughs*.)

"Unless you have the faith of a child, you can't realize God. A mother says, 'He is your elder brother.' The child has such faith that he believes him to be his brother without the least doubt. The mother says, 'There's a bogey man!' The child believes one hundred percent that there is a bogey man in the room. God bestows His mercy on him who has the faith of a child. You cannot attain God with a worldly intellect."

Doctor (*to the devotees*): "It isn't good to drink milk from a cow that eats all sorts of things. We used to feed our cow anything, and later I fell very ill. I wondered what the reason could be. After a great deal of enquiry, I found that it had been eating everything. That created a lot of problems. I had to go to Lucknow [to get cured]. In the end it cost me twelve thousand rupees! (*Roars of laughter*.)

"Well, it's not easy to see the relation between cause and effect. Why misfortune falls, one cannot tell. A seven-month-old girl of a family of the Paikpara gentleman fell ill with whooping cough. I went there to treat her. I couldn't uncover the cause of her illness until I found that she had drunk the milk of an ass that had gotten wet in the rain." (*All laugh*.)

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do you mean? It's like saying my cab passed under a tamarind tree and I

suffered from acidity!" (*The doctor and all others laugh*.)

Doctor (*laughing*): "The captain of a ship had a bad headache. After consultation, the doctor had a poultice applied to the side of the ship. (*All laugh*.)

Company of the holy and renunciation of sense enjoyments

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "It is necessary to keep the constant company of holy people. The disease is chronic. One has to act on their advice and not just listen to them. One has to take medicine and control one's diet. The diet prescribed by a doctor is important."

Doctor: "Prescribed food is most important."

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are three kinds of physicians – superior, mediocre, and inferior. The physician who comes, feels the pulse and leaves, saying, 'You must take the medicine,' is an inferior physician. He doesn't bother to know whether or not the patient has taken the medicine. The physician who makes the patient understand in so many ways why he should take the medicine talks to him nicely, saying, 'Brother, how can you get well unless you take the medicine? Dear brother, do take it. I, myself, will put it in your mouth.' He is a mediocre physician. And the physician who puts his knee on the chest of the patient and forces the medicine down his throat when the patient refuses to take it is the superior physician."

Doctor: "And there are medicines for which you don't have to put your knees on the patient's chest. For example, homeopathic medicines."

Sri Ramakrishna: "There is no danger if a superior physician puts his knee on the patient's chest.

"Like physicians, there are also three kinds of religious teachers. Those who don't keep contact with their disciples after giving them instructions are the inferior ones. Those who explain to their disciples over and over again for their own good so that they can assimilate their instructions – those who implore the disciples lovingly – are mediocre ones. And those who even use force when they find that the disciple hasn't listened are known as superior teachers."

Women and sannyasins – hard rules for sanyasins

(*To the doctor*) "A monk has to avoid 'lust and greed.' He should not even look at the picture of a woman. Do you know what women are like? Like tamarind pickles – the moment you think of them, your mouth begins to water. Tamarind pickles should not be brought into view.

"But this is not for you householders – it is for a monk. As far as possible, you should live unattached among women. From time to time you should go into solitude and meditate on God. No one else should be there. When you have gained faith and love for Him, you will be able to live unattached to a large extent. After having one or two children, a husband and wife should live together as brother and sister. And they should pray to God that the mind not go to sense enjoyment – and that there will be no more children."

Girish (*laughing at the doctor*): "You have been here for three or four hours. Aren't you going to treat your patients?"

Doctor: "My practice and my patients are no more for me now! My meeting this paramahamsa has deprived me of everything!" (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: "Look here, there is a river called karmanasha (the destroyer of all activities). A great problem arises when you take a plunge into this river. Once you dive in, your activity is over. You can't work after that." (*The doctor and all others laugh.*)

Doctor (*to M., Girish, and other devotees*): "Look here, I am your very own. It's not that I come here as a doctor. If you accept me as your own, I am your kith and kin."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "There is such a thing as selfless devotion.[1] It is very good if one can attain it. Prahlada had this selfless devotion. Such a devotee says, 'O Lord, I want neither wealth nor name nor bodily pleasures, and so forth. Only grant that I may have pure love for Thy lotus feet.'"

Doctor: "Yes, I have seen people bowing in the Kali Temple. They have nothing but desires within – 'Grant that I may get some employment' or 'Grant that I be cured,' and so on.

(*To Sri Ramakrishna*) "You should not talk with people because of this disease of yours. But when I come, you may talk with me." (*Everybody laughs.*)

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1. Ahetuki bhakti.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Please cure me of this disease. I can't repeat His name and sing His glories."

Doctor: "Meditation alone is enough."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What are you saying? Why should I live such a monotonous life? I eat fish cooked several different ways – sometimes in curry, sometimes spiced, sometimes with tamarind, and at times fried or baked. Sometimes I perform worship, sometimes I chant God's name,[1] sometimes I meditate, and at other times I sing His name and glories. Sometimes I dance, repeating His name."

Doctor: "I'm not monotonous either."

What is the harm in not believing in the incarnation of God?

Sri Ramakrishna: "Your son, Amrita, doesn't believe in the incarnation of God. What is the harm in it? You can realize God by believing in Him without form and you can also realize God by believing in Him with form. What is needed is to have faith in Him and to surrender yourself. Man is ignorant; he can make mistakes. Can you put four seers of milk in a one-seer jug? Therefore, whatever path you choose, call upon God with a longing heart. He is the knower within the heart. He will surely listen to your inner call. You will reach Him alone, whatever path you take, whether you believe in God with form or God without form, as long as you have a longing heart.

1. Japa.

"Whether you eat sugared roti (Indian bread) straight or sidewise, it will taste equally sweet. Your son, Amrita, is a very good boy."

Doctor: "He is your disciple."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to the doctor*): "No fellow is my disciple. Rather, I am everybody's disciple. We are all children of God. We are all His servants. I also am a child of God, and His servant too.

"'Uncle moon is everybody's uncle.'"

Everyone present enjoys this and laughs.

Section XVI

Vijay, Narendra, M., Doctor Sarkar, and Other Devotees in Joyful Conversation with Sri Ramakrishna

Chapter One

M. on his way to Doctor Sarkar to inform him of Thakur's condition

Today is Sunday, 25 October 1885, 10th of Kartik, the second day of the dark fortnight. Sri Ramakrishna is staying in a house in the Shyampukur area of Calcutta while being treated for cancer of the throat. Doctor Sarkar is his doctor now.

M. is sent daily to the doctor to inform him of Sri Ramakrishna's condition. This morning at half past six M. saluted Sri Ramakrishna and asked him, "How are you feeling?"

Sri Ramakrishna said, "Tell the doctor that in the early hours of the morning my mouth is full of fluid and I have to cough. Ask him if I can take a bath."

M. sees the doctor after seven o'clock and tells him all about Thakur. One or two of his friends and an old teacher are with the doctor. The doctor says to the teacher, "Sir, I woke up at three o'clock this morning concerned about the Paramahamsa. I couldn't sleep after that. He's still on my mind." *(All smile.)*

A friend of the doctor says to him, "Sir, I hear that some people call the Paramahamsa an incarnation of God. You see him daily. What do you think?"

Doctor: "As a man, I have the greatest regard for him."

M. (*to the doctor's friend*): "The doctor is very kind to treat him."

Doctor: "Kindness!"

M.: "Not to him, but to us."

Doctor: "No brother, no! You don't know what I actually lose. I miss two or three calls a day. The next day I go to the patients' houses on my own and don't charge them. How can I charge them when I go to them without being called?"

The talk turns to Mahima Chakravarty. On Saturday when the doctor visited Sri Ramakrishna, Chakravarty was present. Seeing the doctor, he said to Sri Ramakrishna, "Sir, it is to feed the doctor's vanity that you have gotten this disease."

M. (*to the doctor*): "Mahima Chakravarty used to visit you. He used to come to your house to hear you lecture on medical science."

Doctor: "Oh, is that so? How much tamas this fellow has! Didn't you notice that I saluted him as 'God's Lower Third?' God has within him all three qualities (sattva, rajas, and tamas). Did you catch his words, 'You have taken up the disease to feed the vanity of the doctor'?"

M.: "Mahima Chakravarty believes that if the Paramahamsa wants, he can cure himself."

Doctor: "Oh, how is that possible? How can he cure himself? We are medical men and know what cancer is, yet we can't cure it! He knows nothing about it! How will he cure it? (*To his friends*) You see, the disease is incurable, but they are all serving him with great devotion."

Chapter Two

Sri Ramakrishna with his attendant

M. requested the doctor to visit Sri Ramakrishna and then returned home. At three o'clock, after lunch, he went to Sri Ramakrishna again and humbly told him everything. He said, "The doctor embarrassed me today."[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "What happened?"

M.: "He heard yesterday when he came here that you had come down with this disease to add to the vanity of doctors."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Who said that?"

M.: "Mahima Chakravarty."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Then?"

M.: "He called Mahima Chakravarty 'God's Lower Third.' Now the doctor says that God contains all three qualities (sattva, rajas, and tamas). (*Sri Ramakrishna smiles.*) He also told me that he woke up at three in the morning and has been worrying about you ever since. At eight o'clock

1. The Doctor had told M. that since he has to go to examine Sri Ramakrishna, he misses two or three calls a day. The next day he goes to the patients' houses on his own and doesn't charge them.

he said, 'Even now the Paramahamsa is on my mind.'"

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "He has an English education. I can't tell him to meditate on me. But he is doing it by himself!"

M.: "And then he said, 'As a man I have the greatest regard for him.' It means that he doesn't regard you as an incarnation of God, but he has the greatest reverence for you as a man."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Did you talk about anything else?"

M.: "I asked him what the schedule for treatment was today. The doctor said, 'Schedule, my foot! I'll have to go again today. What else is there to schedule?' (*Sri Ramakrishna laughs*.) And he added, 'You don't know how much money I'm losing every day. Every day I miss two or three visits.'"

Chapter Three

Sri Ramakrishna with Vijay and other devotees

A short while later Vijaykrishna Goswami comes to see the Paramahamsa Deva. A number of Brahmo devotees arrive with him. Vijaykrishna was in Dhaka for a long while and has now returned to Calcutta after a pilgrimage to many places in the west (Punjab and Uttar Pradesh). He prostrates before Sri Ramakrishna. A number of people are there – Narendra, Mahima Chakravarty, Navagopal, Bhupati, Latu, M., the Younger Naren, and others.

Mahima Chakravarty (*to Vijay*): "Sir, you have been on pilgrimage and visited a number of places. Please tell us what you saw."

Vijay: "What can I say? I see that everything is here where I am sitting. It's no use just wandering around. At some places there are one or two annas of him (meaning Sri Ramakrishna), four annas at other places, that's all. Only here do I find the full sixteen annas."

Mahima Chakravarty: "Quite right! And again, it is he who sends us roaming about or makes us stay in one place."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "See what a state of mind Vijay has developed! All his characteristics have changed, as if he has been boiled.[1] I can recognize a paramahamsa by his neck and forehead. I can tell whether someone is a paramahamsa or not."

Mahima Chakravarty: "Sir, are you eating less?"

Vijay: "Yes, it seems so. (*To Sri Ramakrishna*) I heard of your illness, so I came to see you. And in Dhaka…"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What?"

Vijay does not answer. He remains silent for a while.

Vijay: "It is very difficult to understand him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] without his help. Only here are sixteen annas."

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1. Sri Ramakrishna means: all impurities have been boiled away.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Kedar[1] says that at other places he doesn't get enough to eat, but here he is given his fill."

Mahima Chakravarty: "His fill! It overflows!"

Vijay (*to Sri Ramakrishna, with folded hand*s): "I have now recognized who you are! You don't need to tell me."

Sri Ramakrishna (*in ecstasy*): "If so, so be it."

Vijay: "I have understood."

Saying this, he falls at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna and holds his feet to his chest. Sri Ramakrishna sits like a statue, unaware of the outer world.

Seeing this wonderful scene and the flood of divine love, some devotees begin to weep. Others sing hymns of praise. They all gaze at Sri Ramakrishna, each according to his own understanding. Some see him as a great devotee, others as a holy man, and yet some others as God-incarnate, each according to his own feeling.

Mahimacharan begins to sing, his eyes filled with tears: 'Behold, behold the image of Love.' Now and then, as if having a glimpse of Brahman, he chants: "The Transcendental, Beyond the distinction of one and many, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute."

Navagopal is weeping. Bhupati, another devotee, sings:

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1. Kedarnath Chatterji was in Dhaka for many days. His eyes would wet with tears on reading the story of the Lord. He was a great devotee. His house was in the city of Hali.

Victory, victory to Parabrahman! Infinite, incomprehensible are You, higher than the highest, the Essence of all essences.

You are the light of truth, the fount of love, the wellspring of all blessedness.

This creation of Yours, a many-flavored elixir, is filled with splendour.

You are the poet, great and primeval, of whose verses the sun and the moon are born, from which they rise, in which they set.

With the golden sprinkling of stars and letters traced from clouds, You have written songs across the blue expanse.

The six seasons of the year, in tune with the rejoicing earth, proclaim Your glory.

The flowers reveal Your beauty, and the waters Your serenity. In thunder resound your terror and majesty.

So deep is Your mystery – what can a foolish mind know of it, even meditating age after age?

Millions of suns, moons and stars joyfully bow at Your feet.

Men and women, seeing Your creation, shed tears of joy, overwhelmed.

Gods, men, and heavenly beings worship Your all-pervading divinity; You, the wellspring of all blessedness.

Bestow knowledge and love, give us devotion and peace. Grant, do grant, us shelter at Your blessed feet.

Bhupati sings again:

In the musical mode of Jhijhit – community singing

Ecstatic waves rise high on the sea of consciousness and bliss. How enthralling, how sweet is the play of great ecstasy!

So many waves of new feeling rise in the sports of love. So many waves – rising, falling, ever repeating. Repeat, O mind, the name of Hari!

The whole of creation becomes one in the great communion. All difference melts away. Time and place, the very thought of distinction – all those and all else are no more.

All my wishes, now fulfilled – they too have melted away.

Now, my mind, be lifted up in joy and repeat Lord Hari's name!

In the rhythmic pattern of Jhamp Tal

Gone are delusion, fear, and piety, ritual actions and good works. Pride of race and caste has vanished.

Where am I? And where is Hari? Having stolen my heart, he has run away.

Why did I come to this shore of love's ocean?

Filled full with feeling is my heart, not yet with dullness overcome.

Says Premdas, Hear all sadhus and all citizens of the earth! Such is the new way of God!

After a long time Sri Ramakrishna regains outer-consciousness.

Brahmajnana and 'strange arithmetic' – purpose of God-incarnate

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "I don't know what happens to me when I'm in ecstasy. Now I feel ashamed, as though I had been possessed by a ghost. 'Me' and 'mine' vanish in that state.

"I can't count when I come down from this state. I count one, seven, eight – something like that."

Narendra: "It's because everything is one, isn't it?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, beyond one and two."[1]

Mahimacharan: "Yes sir, beyond duality[2] and non-duality."[3]

Sri Ramakrishna: "There counting is meaningless. He can't be realized through learning. He is beyond the scriptures – Vedas, Puranas, and Tantras. When I see a person even holding a book in his hands, I call him a rajarshi[4] though he is a jnani. No outer sign can be found in a brahmarishi.[5] Do you know the use of scriptures? Somebody wrote a letter asking for five seers of sandesh and a piece of cloth. The recipient read the letter, remembered 'five seers of sandesh and a piece of cloth,' and threw the letter away. Of what use was the letter then?"

Vijay: "'Sandesh' has been sent, I understand."

Sri Ramakrishna: "God incarnates, assuming a human body. He is certainly present in all places, in all things, but man's desire for God is not fulfilled unless God incarnates in a human form. His needs are not met. Do you know how that is? If you touch a cow anywhere on its body, you have touched the cow. Even if you touch its horn, you have touched the cow. But you can take milk only from its udder." (*All laugh*.)

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1. Beyond one and two: beyond distinction of the Absolute from the relative.
2. Dvaita.
3. Advaita.
4. A person filled with rajas.
5. One who has attained Brahman.

Mahima: "If you want milk, how will it help to suck the horn of the cow? You have to suck the udder." (*All laugh*.)

Vijay: "But a calf first licks around here and there."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And maybe, seeing the calf do this, someone directs its mouth to the udder." (*All laugh*.)

Chapter Four

Rejoicing with the devotees

The conversation is going on this way when the doctor comes to see Thakur. Sitting down, he says, "I woke up suddenly last night at three in the morning. I could only think of you. I thought you might catch cold. And I thought of many other possibilities."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I had a cough and a sore throat. Very early in the morning my mouth was full of fluid. I feel like a thorn has been pricking it."

Doctor: "I heard that this morning."

Mahimacharan continues to talk about his visit to different places in India. He says, "On the island of Lanka[1] no one laughs."

Doctor Sarkar says, "There must be one who laughs. I will have to ask about it."

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1. Now the nation of Sri Lanka; known by the British in Sri Ramakrishna's time as Ceylon.

Medical profession and Sri Ramakrishna

Now the topic of conversation turns to the medical profession.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "Many people think very highly of the physician's calling. But the profession would be the highest of the high only if a doctor were to treat his patients without charge, only out of compassion for their suffering. A doctor becomes hard-hearted if he charges fees. It's base to examine faeces and urine just to make money."

Doctor: "If one only does that, it is certainly wrong. But talking about myself to you would be egotistical."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. It's very good if you can practice medicine in a selfless manner to help others – if you can do it.

"Even so, whatever work a man does, he must keep the company of the holy from time to time. If a man is devoted to God, he will seek holy company himself. I usually give this illustration: a hemp smoker keeps the company of other hemp smokers. If he sees someone who doesn't smoke, he leaves, downcast, or hides. But when he sees another hemp smoker, he is filled with joy. (*All laugh*.) Again, a vulture keeps the company of vultures."

Sadhu has compassion for all living beings

Doctor: "And a vulture flies away in fear of a crow. I say, 'Why serve only man? You should serve all living beings.' I often throw little pellets of wheat flour to sparrows, and flocks of them come to the roof."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Good! That's very good. People who feed other living creatures are holy. Holy people feed sugar to ants."

Doctor: "Will there be no singing today?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "Please sing a little."

Narendra sings to the accompaniment of the tanpura and other musical instruments.

Sweet is Your name, O refuge of the lowly, raining like nectar on our ears and comforting us, O beloved of our souls!

The treasure of Your name is the abode of immortality. He who chants Your name becomes immortal.

When the nectar of Your name touches our ears, it erases in that instant the deep anguish of our hearts.

The sweet music of Your name fills the heart with sweetness. O Master of our hearts, and Soul of our souls!

Narendra sings another song:

O Mother, make me mad with Your love.

What need have I for knowledge or reason?

With the wine of Your love make me drunk,

You who steal the hearts of Your devotees!

Drown me in the ocean of Your love.

In this world, Your madhouse, some laugh, some weep, some dance for joy.

Jesus, Buddha, Gauranga – all are drunk with the wine of Your love.

When, O Mother, shall I join their blessed company?

In the heavens too is Your fair of madness: like guru, like disciple.

Who can understand this play of love?

O Mother, who are mad with love, who are indeed the glory of the mad,

Make this, your beggar Premdas, rich with the treasure of love.

After the singing, an amazing sight follows. They all appear mad, overcome with divine ecstasy. Shaking off his pride of scholarship, a pundit stands up and quotes: "Mother, make me mad with Your love. What need have I of knowledge or reason?" Vijay is the first to rise to his feet; he stands there, intoxicated with divine emotion. Then Sri Ramakrishna stands up, having forgotten for the moment the serious and incurable pain of his body. The doctor stands in front of him. He is not conscious even of his patient. The Younger Naren is in a state of bhava Samadhi, and so is Latu. Doctor Sarkar, a student of science, stands wonderstruck at this amazing scene. He sees that those who are in ecstasy have no awareness of the outside world. They are all still, motionless. As their intoxication subsides, some cry and some laugh. They seem like a group of drunkards.

Chapter Five

With the devotees – Sri Ramakrishna and controlling anger

After this everyone sits down. It is 8:00 p.m. The conversation resumes.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor)*: "The divine ecstasy you saw just now – what do they call it in your science? Do you think it's all pretence?"

Doctor (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "When so many people are in this state, it seems to be natural, not a pretence. (*To Narendra*) When you were singing, 'O Mother, make me mad with Your love. What need have I of knowledge or reason?' I too could not control myself. I also stood up. How could I help it? It was very difficul to control my emotion. I thought I shouldn't make a display of it."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "You are unshakable and immovable like Mount Sumeru. (*Everybody laughs*.) You are a deep soul. No one recognized the depth of Rupa and Sanatana's emotion. If an elephant goes into a small pond, everything goes topsy-turvy. But if it plunges into a deep lake, there is no disturbance; no one even notices. Radha said to her gopi friend, 'Friend, you are weeping so bitterly because of your separation from Krishna. But see how hard my heart is! There's not a tear in my eye.' Then Vrinda said, 'You have no tears in your eyes, but that has meaning. A fire of separation is always burning in your heart. As soon as there is a tear in your eye, it dries up with the heat of that fire.'"

Doctor: "I can't beat you in argument!" (*Laughter*.)

Gradually they talk of other things. Sri Ramakrishna begins to describe his first ecstasy and how to control lust, anger, and other passions.

Doctor: "I heard that you were once in ecstasy and a wicked fellow came and kicked you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You must have heard it from M. The man was Chandra Haldar of Kalighat. He

often visited Mathur Babu. I was lying on the ground, overcome with God-consciousness. It was dark. Chandra Haldar thought I was pretending in order to win Mathur's favour. He came into the room and kicked me black and blue. Everybody said that Mathur Babu should be told, but I forbade it."

Doctor: "This too is due to the will of God. People will learn from it how to overcome anger and be forgiving."

Vijay and Narendra have a glimpse of God's form

In the meantime the devotees have a long talk with Vijay in Thakur's presence.

Vijay: "I feel that somebody is always with me. Even when I'm far away, he tells me what is happening."

Narendra: "Like a guardian angel."

Vijay: "I saw him (the Paramahamsa Deva) in Dhaka. I even touched his body."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "It must have been someone else."

Narendra: "I have also seen him a number of times. (*To Vijay*) So how can I say I don't believe you?"

Section XVII

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at the Shyampukur House

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna with Girish, M., the Younger Naren, Kali, Sarat, Rakhal, Doctor Sarkar, and other devotees

The next day is Monday, 26 October 1885, the 11th of Kartik, the third day of the dark fortnight of Aswin. Sri Ramakrishna is staying in the same house at Shyampukur in Calcutta for treatment.

Doctor Sarkar, his physician, visits almost every day, though devotees go to him regularly to report Thakur's condition.

It is the autumn season. The Saradiya Durga Puja was celebrated a few days ago. Sri Ramakrishna's devotees observed it with mixed joy and sadness, for their gurudeva has been suffering seriously for the last three months with cancer of the throat. Hearing that it is incurable, the unfortunate devotees shed tears in solitude. Some of them are living at the Shyampukur house in order to nurse Sri Ramakrishna, which they are doing with their hearts and souls. Through such service, Narendra and other unmarried young disciples filled with dispassion are learning to climb the steps of the renunciation of 'lust and greed.'

Despite Sri Ramakrishna's severe pain, crowds still come for his darshan. They feel peace and joy when they see him. He is an ocean of motiveless grace, and there is no end to his compassion. He talks to them all, anxious about their welfare. Finally, the doctors – particularly Doctor Sarkar – tell him not to speak at

all. But the doctor himself, who stays there for six or seven hours at a time, says, "You should not talk to anybody else, but you can talk to me."

The doctor is simply enchanted with the nectar of Sri Ramakrishna's words. That is why he stays for such long periods.

M. will go to the doctor at ten o'clock to report Sri Ramakrishna's condition. He speaks to Sri Ramakrishna before going.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "I have much less pain. I feel much better. Is it because of the medicine? Should I take that medicine?"

M.: "I'm going to the doctor. I'll tell him everything. He will prescribe what is best."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You know, Purna[1] hasn't been here for two or three days. I'm worried."

M.: "Kali, why don't you go ask Purna to come?"

Kali: "I'll leave immediately."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "The doctor's son is a very good boy. Please ask him to come."

Chapter Two

Conversation between M. and the doctor

Reaching the doctor's house, M. finds him sitting with two or three friends.

Doctor (*to M.*): "I was talking about you just a minute ago. You said you would come at ten o'clock. I've been waiting here for an hour and a half. I was wondering what happened and how he was doing.

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1. Purna Chandra is 14 or 15 years old.

(*To a friend*) "Brother, please sing that song."

The friend sings:

Sing, as long as you live, the name and glories of Him whose splendour illumines the universe,

Whose boundless love streams like nectar, bringing joy to all.

The thought of His compassion brings a thrill, the hair stands on end. What words can express Him, whose grace instantly ends all sorrows!

"On every side – above, below, in water and sky – where is His limit, where is His end?" his seekers forever ask.

He is the abode of consciousness, the great transformer, stainless and pure, the ever-wakeful eye, whose vision leaves not a trace of sorrow.

Doctor (*to M.*): "Isn't it a beautiful song? Particularly the line, "'Where is His limit, where is His end?" his seekers forever ask.'"

M.: "Yes sir, it is indeed very beautiful, a beautiful conception of the Infinite."

Doctor (*affectionately*): "It is quite late. Have you eaten? I finish my meal by ten o'clock and then go out to give consultations. I don't feel well if I go to work without eating. Listen, I have been thinking of inviting you all to a feast."

M.: "That would be fine, sir."

Doctor: "Well, where should it be, here or there? Whatever you prefer."

M.: "Sir, whether it is here or there, everyone will enjoy it."

Now the topic of conversation turns to Mother Kali.

Doctor: "Kali is just a Santhal[1] woman." (*M. laughs loudly*.)

M.: "Sir, where did you get that?"

The doctor: "I heard something like that somewhere." (*M. laughs*.)

The previous day Vijaykrishna and some other devotees had experienced ecstasy. The doctor was present. The conversation turns to it.

Doctor: "I saw it. But is it good to have so much emotion?"

M.: "Paramahamsa Deva says that an excess of ecstasy that comes by meditation on God does not harm you, even if it is very deep. He says, 'The light of a gem soothes the body. It does not burn it.'"

Doctor: "But the lustre of a gem is only reflected light."

M.: "He also says, 'By drowning in the sea of immortality, one does not die. God is the lake of immortality. Diving into it does no harm. In fact, he becomes immortal – provided he has faith in God.'"

Doctor: "Yes, of course."

Doctor Sarkar gets into his carriage. After examining three or four other patients, he will go see the Paramahamsa Deva. On the way, he talks to M. about different things, beginning with [Mahima] Chakravarty's egotism.

M.: "He visits Sri Ramakrishna. Even if he has a little ego, it will fall off in a few days. A person's pride vanishes when he sits near him. It gets

1. Santhal, an aboriginal tribe of India.

crushed. The reason is that he has no egotism. Pride takes flight before a very humble man. Just see what a great person Vidyasagar is. What modesty and humility he showed Thakur. The Paramahamsa Deva went to see him in his Badurbagan house. It was nine in the evening when he said goodbye. Vidyasagar himself carried a light to show the way from the library to the carriage. And he stood there with folded hands till the carriage left."

Doctor: "Well, what does Vidyasagar think of him?"

M.: "He showed him great respect that day. But I think from what he said afterward that he doesn't like what the Vaishnavas call ecstasy. His views are like yours."

Doctor: "I don't like folding hands or touching somebody's feet with my head. There's no difference between the head and the foot, but if you consider feet different, then go ahead and do it."

M.: "You don't like ecstasy or anything like that. The Paramahamsa sometimes calls you a deep soul.[1] Perhaps you remember yesterday he told you that when an elephant goes into a small pond, it makes a big splash, but when it goes into a lake, there's hardly any movement in the water. When the elephant of emotion enters into a deep soul, it can't affect him in any way. He says that you are a deep soul."

1. Gambhir atman.

Doctor: "I don't deserve the compliment. After all, what is ecstasy? It's a feeling. And then there are other feelings too. If love of God and other feelings are deep, some can control them, others cannot."

M.: "Some explain ecstasy this way, others don't. But sir, ecstasy or love of God is unique. I saw Stebbing's book on Darwinism in your library. Stebbing says that whether or not the human mind is the result of evolution or is a special creation of God, it is equally wonderful. He illustrated it with the theory of light. Whether or not you know the wave theory of light, light in either case is wonderful."

Doctor: "Yes. And did you see that Stebbing accepts Darwinism as well as God?"

They again talk of Sri Ramakrishna.

Doctor: "I see that he is a worshiper of Kali."

M.: "What he means by Kali is different. What the Vedas call the Supreme Brahman (Parabrahman), he calls Kali. What the Muslims call Allah or the Christians God, he calls Kali. He doesn't see many gods – he sees only one. What ancient knowers of the Absolute called Brahman, what yogis call Atman, or devotees call Bhagavan, he calls Kali.

"We have heard this from him: A person had a tub of dye. Anybody who wanted his cloth dyed would go to him. The dyer would ask which colour the fellow wanted. If the latter said green, he would dip the cloth in the tub and return it to him, saying, 'Here is your cloth dyed green.' If another asked

him for red, he would dye his cloth in the same tub and say, 'Here is your cloth dyed red.' He would dye the cloth green, blue, yellow – all colours in the same tub. Seeing this amazing spectacle, a person said to him, 'Sir, do you know what colour I want? Please give me the colour of the dye in your tub.' It is the same with Sri Ramakrishna – he has all the attitudes in him. People of all religions find peace and joy in him. Who can comprehend what his feeling is or its depth?"

Doctor: "All things to all men! But this isn't right, even if St. Paul says it."

M.: "Who can fathom his state of mind? We have heard from him that unless you trade in thread, you can't distinguish thread number 40 from thread number 41. Unless you are a painter, you can't appreciate another painter's art. The experience of a saint is very deep. Unless you become like Christ, you can't truly understand Christ. Perhaps the Paramahamsa Deva's state of realization is the same as what Christ meant when he said: 'Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.'"

Doctor: "How have you arranged to look after him in his illness?"

M.: "At present an older devotee is supervising his nursing every day. Some days it is Girish Babu, some days Ram Babu, some days Balaram Babu, some days Suresh Babu, some days Navagopal, and on other days Kali Babu. It is this way."

Chapter Three

With devotees – what can mere learning do?

While they are talking, the doctor's carriage stops before the Shyampukur House where Thakur is staying. It is one o'clock. Thakur is sitting in a room on the first floor, where many devotees, including Girish Ghosh, the Younger Naren, and Sarat sit in front of him. They are all gazing at the great, ever-joyful yogi. They are sitting spellbound like snakes before a charmer, or like the escorts of a bridegroom reveling in a marriage procession. The doctor and M. come in, salute him, and sit down.

Seeing the doctor, Sri Ramakrishna laughs and says, "I'm feeling much better today."

In due course there is conversation on God.

The earlier story – Doctor Ramnarayan – conversation with Bankim

Sri Ramakrishna: "What use is mere learning without discrimination and dispassion? I go into a strange mood when I think of the lotus feet of the Lord. Then the cloth I wear on my body drops. And I feel a strange sensation move up from my feet to my head. Then everything appears to me as mere straw. When I see that a pundit is without discrimination and has no love for God, he appears to me just like a dry piece of straw.

"Doctor Ramnarayan was reasoning with me when I suddenly went into that mood. I said to him, 'What are you saying? What can you understand of Him with your reason? Or what can you understand of His creation? You have the simple mind of a weaver!' Seeing me in that state of mind, he began to cry and stroke my feet."

Doctor: "You see, Doctor Ramnarayan is a Hindu. Besides, he believes in sandal paste and flowers. He is an orthodox Hindu."

M. (*to himself*): The doctor said earlier that he had nothing to do with gongs and conch-shells.[1]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to doctor*): "Bankim[2] is one of your pundits. I met him once. I asked him, 'What is the duty of man?' He replied, 'Eating, sleeping and procreating.' When I heard him say this, he fell in my estimation. I said, 'What are you saying? How low can you get? Whatever you think day and night, whatever you do all the time, comes out of your mouth. When you eat radish, you belch radish.' Then we had a long conversation about God. There was devotional music, and I danced. Then Bankim said, 'Sir, please visit my house once.' I replied, 'If God wills.' Then he said, 'You will find devotees there too.' I laughed and said, 'My dear, what kind of devotees do you have there? Are they like those who cried, 'Gopal, Gopal?'"

Doctor: "'Gopal, Gopal!' What does that mean?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A goldsmith had a shop. He was a great devotee – a true Vaishnava with beads around his neck, holy marks on his forehead, and a rosary in his hand. Everybody would go to that shop, thinking that he was such a great devotee that he wouldn't cheat them. Seeing a party of

1. Used in ritualistic worship.
2. Bankim Chandra Chatterji is a resident of the Benetola area of Calcutta, a deputy magistrate, and a great devotee. Sri Ramakrishna met him at Adhar Sen's house, and this was their only meeting. Bankim was also the celebrated Bengali author of *Vande Mataram*.

customers, one of his craftsmen would say, 'Keshab, Keshab.' After a while another would recite the name, 'Gopal, Gopal.' After some time, a third would say 'Hari, Hari!' And finally one would utter 'Har-Har.' Hearing so many names of God in the course of work, the customer would naturally say to himself, 'This goldsmith is a man of very high character.' But do you know the truth? The fellow who said, 'Keshab, Keshab,' meant to ask, 'What are they like?' The one who said, 'Gopal, Gopal,' would mean that he had assessed them and found them to be a herd of cows. (*Laughter*.) The one who said, 'Hari, Hari' meant, if they were just a herd of cows, should we rob them? (*Laughter*.) And he who said, 'Har, Har' would mean, 'Yes, yes, do, since they are a herd of cows.' (*Laughter*.)

"I went somewhere with Mathur Babu, and a number of pundits came to argue with me – me, a fool! (*All laugh*.) Seeing me in that strange mood, and after having talked with me, they said, 'Sir, all that we have read, all our knowledge and scholarship, has turned to spittle after talking to you. We now understand that when God's grace is granted, there is no lack of spiritual knowledge. A fool becomes wise, and the dumb begin to speak.' That's why I say that no one becomes learned just by reading books."

Earlier story – first instance of samadhi – manifestation[1] of Saraswati[2] seated in the throat of a fool

"Yes, when you receive His grace, can there be any lack of knowledge? Look, I am a fool, I know nothing. Then who speaks all this? The storehouse of this knowledge is inexhaustible. One day in Kamarpukur I saw them weighing heaps of paddy. As they did, they chanted, 'Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram.' One person was weighing and the other was pushing the heap of paddy toward him as the first heap dwindled. It is the same in my case when I talk. Before I finish, my Divine Mother pushes more from Her inexhaustible store of knowledge.

"During my boyhood God manifested Himself in me. I was eleven and I was going across a field when I saw something above. They say I was completely unconscious, not aware of anything. I have become a different person since then. I began to see another person within me. When I went to worship the deity, my hand, instead of going to the deity, would come to my head and I would offer flowers to it. The young man who was living with me would not come near me. He said, 'I see a strange light in your face. I'm afraid to come near you.'"

1. Avirbhava.
2. Goddess of knowledge.

Chapter Four

Free will or God's will

yantrārūḍhāni māyayā ||

[All beings revolve by His Maya, as though mounted on a machine.]

– Bhagavad Gita 18:61

Sri Ramakrishna: "I am a fool, I know nothing. So who, then, says all this? I say, 'Mother, I am a machine, You are the operator; I am the house, You are the indweller; I am the chariot, You are the charioteer; I do what You make me do; I speak as You make me speak; I move as You make me move. Not I, not I. You, only You.' She is ever victorious. I am merely an instrument. When Radha was carrying a pitcher with a thousand holes and not a drop of water leaked out of it, everybody began to praise her, saying that such a faithful[1] wife is rarely found. Then Radha said, 'Why do you praise me? Instead you should say, "Victory to Krishna, victory to Krishna!" I am merely His maidservant.' In that same mood I once put my foot on Vijay's chest. Though I have such great respect for him, I put my foot on his chest! What would you say to that?"

Doctor: "You should be careful now."

Sri Ramakrishna (*folding his hands*): "How can I help it? When that mood comes over me, I become unaware of everything. I have no idea what I'm doing."

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1. Sati.

Doctor: "You must be careful. It's no use just to fold your hands with humility."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Can I do anything myself in that mood? What do you think of that state? If you think it is pretence, I would say that all your science is less than worthless."

Doctor: "Sir, if I think that, why do I come so often? Look, I neglect my work to come here. I miss visits with many patients while I stay here for six or seven hours!"

I will not fight – the Bhagavad Gita – only God is the doer, Arjuna an instrument

Sri Ramakrishna: "I said to Mathur Babu, 'Don't think that I feel blessed because an important man like you believes me and respects me.' You may respect me or not, but the fact is that a mere man can do nothing. Only God makes one respect another. Before God's power, man is a mere straw."

Doctor: "Do you think I respect you because some fisherman[1] believes you? I have respect and regard for you as a man."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Am I asking you to respect me, brother?"

Girish Ghosh: "Does he ask you to have respect for him?"

Doctor (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Are you saying that it is all God's will?"

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1. Doctor Sarkar is referring here to Mathur Babu (Sejo Babu). He was a fisherman by caste.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What else am I saying? What can a man do before the will of God? Arjuna said in the battle of Kurukshetra, 'I won't fight this battle, I won't kill my relatives.' Sri Krishna said, 'Arjuna, you will have to fight. Your nature will compel you.'[1] Sri Krishna revealed everything to him – that everyone had already been slain.[2] Some Sikhs that came to the temple said that even the leaf of an ashwattha tree trembles by the will of God, that not a single leaf can flutter without His will."

Liberty or necessity – influence of motives

Doctor: "If it is the will of God, why do you chatter? Why do you talk so much to give spiritual knowledge to others?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He makes me talk, so I talk. I am an instrument, He is the operator of the instrument."

Doctor: "You say that you are the instrument. It's all right to say that. Or be quiet knowing that everything is God."

Girish: "Say what you like, brother. But it is He who makes us act. Can anyone take a single step against the Almighty's will?"

Doctor: "But He Himself has given us free will. If I like, I can meditate on God, and if I don't like, I don't have to."

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1. Bhagavad Gita 18:59.

2. mayāivaite nihatāḥ pūrvam eva nimittamātraṁ bhava savyasācin। Bhagavad Gita 11:33. [By Me they have already been destroyed; be you, O skilled archer, a mere instrument!]

Girish: "If you meditate on God or do any other good work, you do it because you like to. It's not you who do these things, but your liking them that makes you do them."

Doctor: "Why? I do them as duties."

Girish: "That's because you like to do your duty."

Doctor: "Suppose a child is being burned. I go to save it out of a sense of duty."

Girish: "You feel happy you are able to save the child. That's why you rush into the fire. It's the positive feeling that makes you go. You take opium in the expectation of enjoying spicy food later." (*All laugh*.)

Knowledge, the object of knowledge, and the knower are the threefold impulse to action[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "You have to have some kind of faith to take up any work. You think of your objective and take pleasure from that. Only then will you do the work. Suppose there is a metal jar full of gold coins buried in the ground. First you have to know about it, know it's there. When you think of the jar, you feel pleasure. Then you begin to dig into the earth. As you dig, you hear a metallic sound, which makes you happy. Then the side of the jar becomes visible and you are happier still. In this way your happiness gradually increases. Standing on the verandah of the temple, I have seen sadhus preparing to smoke hemp and anticipating the joy."

1. Bhagavad Gita 18:18.

Doctor: "But fire emits both heat and light. You are able to see in the light, but the heat burns your feet. When you do your duty, it's not just that you get pleasure out of it – it also can bring trouble."

M. (*to Girish*): "When your stomach is filled with food, your back can bear the load. There is pleasure even in trouble."

Girish (*to the doctor*): "Duty is dry."

Doctor: "Why so?"

Girish: "Then it must be juicy." (*All laugh.*)

M.: "Very good! Beautiful! You take a bitter pill in the hope of something spicy later on."

Girish (*to the doctor*): "You must feel that duty is pleasant. Why else would you do it?"

Doctor: "Because my mind is inclined that way."

M. (*to Girish*): "Your nature pulls you to it. (*Laughter.*) If it is the inclination of your nature, where does free will come in?"

Doctor: "I don't say that a person is absolutely free. A cow tied to a post is free only as far as the rope allows. The pull of the rope…"

Sri Ramakrishna and free will

Sri Ramakrishna: "Jadu Mallick also gave this illustration. (*To the Younger Naren*) Is it in some English book?

(*To the doctor*) "Look, it is God who does everything. 'He is the operator and I am the instrument.' If you can have this faith, you will

become liberated in this very life.[1] 'You (God) do Your own work, but people say they are doing it.' Do you know how it is? There is a beautiful illustration in the Vedanta. Rice is being cooked in a pot. Potatoes and eggplant have been put in with it. After a while the potatoes and eggplant begin to jump up and down as though they were proud of themselves – 'I am moving, I am jumping up and down!' When young children see it, they think that the potatoes, rice, and eggplant are alive and jumping up and down. But their elders, who know better, explain that the potatoes, eggplant, and rice are not animate; they don't jump up and down by themselves. The moment you remove the burning log from under them, they stop moving. 'I am the doer' – this pride of man is the result of ignorance. People are powerful only by God's power. Everything becomes quiet when you pull that burning log out from under. Marionettes dance beautifully when their strings are in the hands of a puppeteer, but the moment the strings fall from his hands, they can't move.

"As long as you have not seen God, as long as you haven't touched the philosopher's stone, you remain under the delusion that you are the doer – that you are doing right or doing wrong. This awareness persists. The feeling of distinction is God's maya and is necessary to run His world of illusion. But by taking refuge in the maya of knowledge,[2] by taking the road of truth, you can realize Him. He who realizes God, who gets His

1. Jivanmukta.
2. Vidyamaya.

vision, he alone can cross over His maya. 'God alone is the doer; I do nothing': someone who has this faith becomes liberated in this very life. I said that to Keshab Sen."

Girish (*to the doctor*): "Free will, how do you know it exists?"

Doctor: "Not by reason. I feel it."

Girish: "But I and others feel it otherwise." (*All laugh*.)

Doctor: "There are two elements to duty. One, I go to work out of a sense of duty. Two, I find pleasure in it. But initially I don't perform duty in the hope of pleasure. When I was a child, I noticed that the priest was very worried to see ants on the sandesh to be offered. The thought of the sweets gave him no pleasure. (*Smiling*) Instead, he felt worried."

M. (*to himself*): "It is very difficult to say whether one feels pleasure while doing a duty or thinking of it afterward. Where is free will if action is impelled by pleasure?"

Chapter Five

Spontaneous love of God[1] – earlier story of his life: Sri Ramakrishna's attitude of being a servant of God

Sri Ramakrishna: "What he (the doctor) is talking about is called devotion without any selfish motive: I don't want anything from Mahendra Sarkar. I want nothing, but I like to see him. This

1. Ahetuki bhakti.

actually is called selfless love. If I derive a little pleasure out of it, how can I help that?

"Ahalya said, 'Rama, I don't mind even being born a pig, but I wish for pure love and devotion at Your lotus feet. I want nothing else.'

"Narada went to see Sri Ramachandra at Ayodhya to remind him that he was to slay Ravana. Seeing Sita and Rama, he began to chant their praises. Delighted with his devotion, Ramachandra said, 'Narada, I am pleased with your chants; please ask for a boon.' Narada said, 'Rama, if you must grant me a boon, please grant that I may have pure love and devotion for your lotus feet. And may your world-bewitching maya not enchant me.' Rama said, 'Ask for another boon.' Narada replied, 'I want nothing more. I only want pure love for Your lotus feet.'

"It is the same with him (the doctor). He only wants to see God. He doesn't want wealth, honour, and physical comforts. He wants nothing at all. This is called pure love and devotion.

"It does give some pleasure, but it's not the pleasure of the senses. It's the pleasure of devotion to God and ecstatic love. Sambhu Mallick once said when I went to visit him, 'You come here because you feel happy talking to me.' Yes, there is that bit of happiness.

"But there is a state higher than this, when one wanders around aimlessly like a child, perhaps just to catch a grasshopper.

(*To the devotees*) "Do you understand his (the doctor's) attitude? It is a prayer: 'O God, grant me

the right inclination so that I won't be tempted to do wrong.'

"I also felt this state. It is called the attitude of a servant. I used to cry, 'Mother, Mother' so desperately that people would gather around me. When I was in this state, someone brought a prostitute to my room to tempt me and cure me of my madness. She was a beautiful woman with pretty eyes. I ran out of the room crying, 'Mother, Mother.' Shouting for Haladhari, I said, 'Brother, come and see who has entered my room!' I told him and others about the woman. In this state I used to weep, crying, 'Mother, Mother, save me! Mother, purify me so that my mind doesn't go from truth to untruth!' (*To the doctor*) This attitude of yours is good. It is the attitude of a devotee,[1] the attitude of a servant of God."

Doing good to mankind – ordinary people – selfless work and purity of character[2]

"If someone is pure in character, he thinks only of God. He likes nothing else. Some people are born with pure sattva because of their past actions.[3] By striving to act selflessly, one finally attains pure sattva. When sattva is mixed with rajas, the mind is diverted. Then one is possessed by the vanity of doing good to the world – but it's very difficult for an ordinary person to do good to the world. However, there is no harm in working selflessly to do good.[4] It's very good for a person to try to work

1. Bhakti bhava.
2. Sattva.
3. Prarabdha karma.
4 . Nishkama karma

in this way, but it isn't possible for everybody. It's very difficult. Of course everybody has to work; only a few can give up work altogether. Pure sattva is found in only a very few. But when a person works selflessly, the quality of sattva mixed with rajas gradually turns into pure sattva.

"It's only when one has developed pure sattva that he realizes God, through His grace.

"An ordinary person can't understand the state of pure sattva. Hem once said to me, 'Well, my dear priest,[1] isn't the aim of life to earn name and fame in the world? Don't you think so?'"

1. Hem addressed Ramakrishna as Mr. Bhattacharya, a title of respect for priests. His remark is tinged with sarcasm and suggests that even so-called holy people can be attached to name and fame.

Section XVIII

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra, Doctor Sarkar, Girish Ghosh, and Other Devotees

Joyful Conversation

Chapter One

The joy of devotional music – in samadhi

The next day at half past five, Tuesday, 27 October 1885. Narendra, Doctor Sarkar, Shyam Bose, Girish, Doctor Dukari, the Younger Naren, Rakhal, M., and others have come. The doctor feels Sri Ramakrishna's pulse and prescribes medicine.

Thakur talks about his pain and takes the medicine. After that the doctor says, "Now talk with Shyam Babu and I will leave."

Sri Ramakrishna and a devotee ask him, "Would you like to hear a song?"

Doctor: "You become so emotional. You have to keep your feelings under control."

The doctor sits down again. Narendra begins to sing in a sweet voice to the accompaniment of the tanpura (a stringed drone) and mridanga (drum). He sings:

> Wonderful and infinite is this world of Yours,
> This universe, a treasury of beauty.

The stars shine like a necklace of thousands of gems;
Innumerable are the moons and suns.

The earth luxuriates with a wealth of grain,
And full indeed is Your storehouse.

O great Lord, countless are the people who ceaselessly sing Your praise!

Then he sings a second song:

In dense darkness, O Mother, Your formless beauty sparkles. And so the yogi meditates in a dark mountain cave.

In the lap of infinite darkness, on the waves of the great silence,[1] eternal peace and joy float without end.

Putting on the form of the Formless One, in darkness draped, O Mother, who are You seated alone in boundless bliss?

At the lotus of Your fear-dispelling feet flashes the lightning of love, while loud and earth-shaking laughter issues from Your dazzling face.

The doctor says to M., "This is dangerous for him, this singing. If he goes into ecstasy, it could be dangerous."

Sri Ramakrishna asks M. what the doctor said. M. replies, "The doctor is afraid a song will excite your feelings and bring on samadhi." Even while he speaks, Sri Ramakrishna goes into an ecstatic mood. Looking at the doctor with folded hands, he says, "No, no. Why should I go into samadhi?" However, even while saying this, he goes into deep samadhi, his body still, his eyes fixed. Speechless and unaware of the outside world, he resembles a wooden statue. His mind, intellect, and ego are all turned inward. He is no longer the same person.

1. Nirvana.

Narendra continues singing the sweet song with his melodious voice:

What wondrous beauty, what an enchanting face I see!

The Lord of my soul has entered my humble hut, and the spring of love wells forth.

O Lord, beloved of my heart, what treasure shall I offer You?

Accept my soul, accept my life; whatever I have, accept all that from me.

And again:

O gracious Lord, what happiness can there be in life if the bee of my soul is not lost forever in the lotus of Your feet?

What can I gain from limitless wealth if I do not seek the gem supreme?

I do not wish to behold a child's tender face
if there I cannot catch a glimpse of Your loving countenance.

Moonlight has no meaning for me: I see darkness everywhere, unless in that moonlight I behold Your loving face.

Even the untainted gold of the chaste wife's love is stained, unless it holds the gem of Your love.

O Lord, doubt bites me endlessly, a deadly serpent whose venom dilutes my love for You.

What more can I say, my Lord? You are the precious jewel of my heart, the abode of my joy.

When the doctor hears the line, "Even the untainted gold of the chaste wife's love," his eyes fill with tears and he exclaims, "Ah! Ah!"

Narendra sings another song:

Oh, when will ecstatic love dawn in my heart? When shall I, wishing for nothing else, chant Hari's name while tears stream from my eyes?

When will my life breath and mind be pure, when shall I, a pilgrim to the Vrindavan of love, shed my worldly bonds?

When will the collyrium of knowledge drive away the darkness from my eyes?

When, by the touch of the philosopher's stone, will this body of iron turn to gold?

When shall I see the universe pervaded by God and be immersed in love divine?

Oh, when shall I be free from rites and work and the pride of family and caste?

When will fear and shame loosen their hold, and I be freed from convention's pride?

My body besmeared with the dust of devotees' feet, the sweet burden of perpetual dispassion on my shoulders, I shall scoop up the Yamuna's water of love divine and drink it from my hands.

Then drunk with love, I shall weep and laugh and swim in the sea of Sachchidananda.

Mad myself, I shall make others mad and dwell always at the feet of the Lord.

Chapter Two

Jnana and vijnana[1] – perception of Brahman

In the meantime Sri Ramakrishna regains outer consciousness. The songs have ended. Now a very interesting talk begins, intriguing to every type of

1. An intimate knowledge of God by which the universe and all living beings are seen as manifestations of the divine.

person – scholar and fool, young and old, man and woman – to all without distinction. All are spellbound, gazing at Thakur's beautiful face. Where is his terrible pain now? His face looks like a lotus in full bloom, shining with divine light. Addressing the doctor, Thakur says, "Give up false modesty. Why be ashamed of repeating the name of God? As the proverb goes, 'Shame, hatred, and fear keep one from attaining God.' You think, I am a great man, so I can't dance and utter the name of the Lord; if other big people hear of it, what will they think of me? It would be a shame for them to say, 'The doctor was dancing and chanting the name of the Lord!' Give up such ideas."

Doctor: "I don't think that way. I don't care what others say."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You are too much that way! (*All laugh*.)

"Listen, go beyond knowledge and ignorance.[1] Only then will you be able to know God. Knowledge of many things is ignorance. Pride of learning is also ignorance. 'God pervades all' – this conviction is knowledge. Knowing Him intimately is called vijnana. Say a thorn has stuck into your foot. You need another thorn to take it out. When you have taken out the thorn that pricked you, you throw them both away. To remove the thorn of ignorance, you first have to acquire the thorn of knowledge. Then both the thorns of knowledge and ignorance have to be thrown away. He is beyond knowledge and ignorance. Lakshmana said to Rama, 'How

1. Jnana and ajnana.

strange! Vasishtha Deva[1] is such a wise man, but even he wept inconsolably at the death of his son.' Rama said, 'Brother, he who has knowledge also has ignorance. He who has knowledge of one kind also has knowledge of other kinds. He who is aware of light is also aware of darkness. Brahman is beyond knowledge and ignorance, beyond virtue and vice, beyond righteousness and unrighteousness, beyond purity and impurity.'"

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna recites a song of Ramprasad:

> Come, O mind, let us go for a walk to Kali, the wish-fulfilling tree and gather there the four fruits of life.
>
> Of your two wives, Worldliness and Dispassion, take only Dispassion along, and ask her eldest son, Discrimination, for the truth about Reality.[2]

Beyond speech and mind – the real nature of Brahman cannot be described

Shyam Bose: "What will remain when both thorns are thrown away?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The eternal, ever-pure Consciousness[3] – the Essence. How can I make it clear to you? If somebody asks you how ghee[4] tastes, how can you explain it? At the most you can say, 'What is ghee like? It's just like ghee.' A girl said to her friend, 'Your husband has arrived. Tell me, what is the joy you feel?' The friend said, 'Sister, you will only know when you have a husband. How can I tell you?' The Purana says that

1. Rama's preceptor and a holy sage.
2. For complete song see: Section II, Chapter VI.
3. Nitya-shuddha-bodha-rupam.
4. Clarified butter.

when Bhagavati, the divine Mother, took birth in the house of Himalaya, She showed Herself to Him in various forms. When Giriraj (the Lord of the mountains, Himalaya) had seen Her in many forms, He said to Her, 'Mother, may I now have the vision of Brahman mentioned in the Vedas?' Bhagavati replied, 'Father, if you want to see Brahman, you must have the company of holy people.'

"What Brahman is cannot be explained in words. Someone said, 'Everything has been made impure by the tongue, but Brahman has never been defiled.' It means that the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, and other scriptures may be said to have been defiled because they are recited by the tongues of men. But what Brahman is, nobody has yet been able to express in speech. So Brahman has not yet been defiled. One cannot describe in words the play and communion with Sat-chit-ananda. Only he knows who has experienced it."

Chapter Three

The pride of a pundit – vice and virtue

Addressing the doctor again, Sri Ramakrishna says, "Look, you cannot attain knowledge until you are rid of the ego. There is a saying: 'When shall I be free? When "I" ceases to be.' 'My' and 'mine' are ignorance; 'You' and 'Yours' are knowledge. A devotee says, 'O God, You alone are the doer. You alone do everything. I am only an instrument. I do what You make me do. And all this splendour, this universe, is Yours. This house, this family, is Yours

– nothing is mine. I am Your servant. I have only the right to serve You as You command.'

"Anybody who has read even a little begins at once to put on airs. I had a talk about God with Kalikrishna Tagore. He said, 'I know all that.' I said, 'Does a person who visits Delhi brag about it? Does a babu[1] go around saying he's a gentleman?'"

Shyam Bose: "But Kalikrishna Tagore has great respect for you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What can I say, brother? There was a scavenger woman at the temple garden in Dakshineswar. So puffed up because she had some jewelry! One day when she was walking on the path, a few people passed by her. Angrily she shouted at them, 'Hey, get out of my way!' If she could be so arrogant, what can I say about the pride of others?"

Shyam Bose: "Sir, there is punishment for sins. How can you say that God is doing everything?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You have the intellect of a goldsmith."

Narendra: "A 'goldsmith's intellect' means a calculating mind."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I tell you, eat the mangoes! What's the use of calculating how many hundreds of trees there are in the orchard, how many thousands of branches, how many millions of leaves? Why calculate all this? You've come to eat mangoes. Eat them!

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1. A man of a highly respectable family or social position.

(*To Shyam Bose*) "You've been born in this world to worship God. Try to gain love and devotion for His lotus feet! Why bother with other things? What will you gain by philosophizing? Look, you can get drunk with only a little wine. Why do you have to know how many measures of wine there are in the wine shop?"

Doctor: "Besides, God's wine is infinite. It has no measure."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shyam Bose*): "Give your general power of attorney to God. Lay the whole burden on Him. If you give responsibility to an honest fellow, will he deceive you? It's for God alone to know whether or not He will punish you."

Doctor: "Only He knows what is in His mind. How can anyone figure it out? God is above and beyond all human calculation!"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shyam Bose*): "You Calcutta people have only this to say: God is partial because He makes one person happy and another miserable. Whatever these rascals see in themselves, they see in God."

Is earning name and fame the aim of life?

"Hem used to visit Dakshineswar. Whenever he saw me, he would say, 'Well, revered priest, isn't earning a name in the world the main thing?' You see, very few people say that the aim of human life is God-realization."

Chapter Four

The gross, the subtle, the causal, and the Great Cause

Shyam Bose: "Can anyone show us the subtle body? Can anyone demonstrate that this very subtle body leaves the gross body?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A true devotee doesn't care a whit to show you all this. What does he care if some fool believes him or not? He doesn't care whether he influences some big fellow or not."

Shyam Bose: "Well, what is the difference between the gross body and the subtle body?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The body that is made of five elements is the gross body. The subtle body is the mind, the intellect, the ego, and the mind-stuff. That by which one enjoys the bliss of God and communion with Him is the causal body. It is called 'Bhagavati tanu'[1] in the Tantra – the Divine Body. Last of all is the Great Cause[2] which cannot be expressed in words."

Need for spiritual disciplines – devotion to God alone matters

"What is the use of just listening to all this? You have to do something.

"What is the use of shouting, 'Hemp, hemp?'[3] Will that make you high?

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1. The Causal body, derived from the Mother of Universe (Bhagavati).
2. Mahakarana, the unconditioned turiya.
3. A play on words: siddhi means both "attainment" and "hemp."

"You can't get high even if you rub hemp-paste on your body. You have to eat some. Which is number 41 grade yarn and which is number 40? You can't tell unless you work in the yarn trade. A person in the trade has no difficulty at all picking out yarn of a particular grade. So I say, practice some spiritual disciplines. Then you will know it all – the gross, the subtle, the causal and the Great Cause. When you pray to God, just pray for love at His lotus feet.

"After Ahalya was freed from the curse, Ramachandra said to her, 'Ask for a boon from me.' Ahalya said, 'Rama, if you wish to grant me a boon, grant that even if I am born a pig, my mind will always dwell at your lotus feet.'

"I asked the Divine Mother only for love and devotion. Offering flowers at Her feet and folding my hands, I said: 'O Mother, here is Your knowledge, here is Your ignorance; please grant me pure love and devotion. Here is Your purity, here is Your impurity, just grant me pure devotion. Here are Your virtuous acts, here is vice, just grant me pure love. Here is Your righteousness, here is Your unrighteousness, just grant me pure devotion.

"Righteousness – charitable work and so on. If you accept righteousness, you will also have to accept unrighteousness. If you accept virtue, you will also have to accept vice. If you believe in knowledge, you will have to accept ignorance too. If you accept ritual purity, you will also have to accept ritual impurity. If you are aware of light, you are also aware of darkness. If you have the knowledge of one, you also have the knowledge of

many. The person who has knowledge of good also has knowledge of what is evil.

"If a person has love and devotion for the lotus feet of God, even though he may eat pork, he is blessed. On the other hand, if a person's mind is attached to the world, even if he lives on boiled rice with clarified butter…"

Doctor: "That's not right. Let me tell you something. Buddha ate pork and he suffered from colic. Because of the pain, he took opium. Do you know what nirvana and all that is? Taking opium and remaining sedated. He'd lose all external consciousness. This was his nirvana."

Everybody laughs to hear such an interpretation of Buddha's nirvana. The conversation continues.

Chapter Five

Household and selfless work – Theosophy

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shyam Bose*): "There is no harm in leading a householder life. But you must do your work selflessly, fixing your mind at the lotus feet of God. You see, if a person has a boil on his back, he talks to everybody and attends to his work too, but his mind is always on the boil. It is the same.

"Or live in the world like an unchaste woman. Her mind is drawn to her lover even while she's performing her household duties. (*To the doctor*) Do you understand?"

Doctor: "If I don't have such an attitude, how can I understand?"

Shyam Bose: "You do understand it a little. Don't you?" (*Everybody laughs*.)

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "He has been in this trade for quite some time. Isn't that true?" (*All laugh*.)

Shyam Bose: "Sir, what do you think of Theosophy?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The thing is that people who go around making disciples are of inferior calibre. And those who want occult powers are also of a lower class. For example, the power to walk across the Ganges on foot, or to be able to tell what a person is saying at some distant place – that is an occult power. It is very difficult for such a person to have pure love for God."

Shyam Bose: "But the Theosophists are trying to re-establish Hinduism."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I don't know much about them."

Shyam Bose: "Where the embodied soul[1] goes after death – whether to the region of the moon or some planet and so on – is all explained in Theosophy."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That may be so. But do you know how I feel? Somebody asked Hanuman, 'What day and date is today?' Hanuman said, 'I don't know the day, nor the date, nor the position of the planets – nothing. I only think about Rama.' My attitude is exactly like that."

---

1. Jivatman.

Shyam Bose: "They believe in Great Souls.[1] Do you?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you believe in my words, I say yes. Now leave these matters alone. Come when I feel a little better. If you have faith in me, you will find some way to peace. Don't you notice that I don't accept money or gifts of clothes? No offering has to be made here. That is why so many people visit me. (*All laugh*.)

(*To the doctor*) "I want to say this. Please don't take offense. You have done all these things – earned money and name, lectured. Now fix your mind on God for a while. And come here now and then. Talking about God is inspiring."

After some time the doctor rises to leave. At the same time Girish Ghosh arrives and, taking the dust of Sri Ramakrishna's feet, takes a seat. The doctor is happy to see him and sits down again.

Doctor: "The whole time I was here, he didn't come. Just as I rise to leave, he arrives!" (*All laugh*.)

The doctor and Girish begin to talk about the Science Association.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Will you take me there some time?"

Doctor: "If you go there, you will lose consciousness seeing all the wonderful works of God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Really?"

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1. Mahatmas.

Chapter Six

Adoration of the guru

Doctor (*to Girish*): "Do whatever you like, but please do not worship him as God. By doing so, you are bringing ruin to such a good man."

Girish: "Sir, how can I help it? How else can I feel about him who has taken me across the ocean of the world and the ocean of doubt? Tell me, can I even look on his excrement as excrement?"

Doctor: "It's not a matter of excrement. That doesn't disgust me either. One day a shopkeeper's son came to see me and he defecated. Everybody covered their noses with cloths. I sat beside him for half an hour and didn't bring my handkerchief to my nose. I don't even cover my nose when a scavenger passes by with a bucket on his head. I know that I am the same as he. How can I feel revulsion? Can't I take the dust of his (Sri Ramakrishna's) feet? See, I take it." (*He takes the dust of Sri Ramakrishna's feet.*)

Girish: "The angels are ringing bells at this moment."

Doctor: "What is strange about taking the dust of a man's feet? I can take dust of anybody's feet. See? Watch me take it! (*He takes the dust of everybody's feet.*)

Narendra (*to the doctor*): "We consider him to be like God. Do you know what it is like? There is a point somewhere between the vegetable and the animal kingdoms where it is very difficult to distinguish whether something is animate or

inanimate. In the same way, there is a point between the man-world and the God-world where it is difficult to tell whether a person is human or God."

Doctor: "Well, dear brother, analogies do not apply to God."

Narendra: "I'm not saying that he is God. I am only saying that he is a godlike man."

Doctor: "One should not give vent to such feelings. It's not good to express them. Nobody understands my own feelings. Even my best friends think of me as hard and cruel. Maybe even you people will turn me out after beating me with your shoes."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "How can you say that? These people have great affection for you. They await your arrival as eagerly as the ladies in a bridal chamber await the coming bride-groom."

Girish: "Everyone has the greatest respect for you."

Doctor: "My son and even my wife think of me as hard-hearted. It is because I don't express my feelings to anybody."

Girish: "In that case, sir, you'd better open the doors of your heart out of pity for your friends so they can understand you."

Doctor: "What can I say? My feelings get worked up even more than yours. (*To Narendra*) I shed tears in solitude."

Godlike men assume mankind's karma – Narendra's attitude

Doctor (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Well, sometimes in ecstasy you place your feet on people. That's not good."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But do you think I know that I'm putting my foot on anybody?"

Doctor: "You don't think it's right, do you?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "How can I tell you what happens to me in the state of samadhi? After I come down from it, I think that maybe I have this disease because of it. The thought of God makes me mad. All this happens in a state of divine madness. How can I help it?"

Doctor: "He agrees with me. He expresses regret for what he does. He knows that such an act is sinful."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "You are very clever. Why don't you answer? Explain it to him."

Girish (*to the doctor*): "Sir, you are mistaken. He is not sorry for that. His body is pure, untouched by sin. He touches people for their good. There is a great possibility of his getting a disease by taking their sins on himself. That is what he thinks sometimes. When you had colic pain, didn't you regret having stayed up late at night and reading? Does that mean it's bad to stay awake and read at night? He may regret that he's ill, but he doesn't think that it's wrong to touch others for their good."

Doctor (*embarrassed, to Girish*): "I stand defeated. Give me the dust of your feet. (*He takes the dust of Girish's feet.*)

(*To Narendra*) "I have to acknowledge his intellectual power."

Narendra (*to the doctor*): "And think of it this way too. You can devote your life to the discovery of scientific truth and not care about physical hardship and comfort. Can he not risk his health for God, the greatest of all sciences?"

Doctor: "All religious reformers – Jesus, Chaitanya, Buddha and Mohammed – were filled with conceit in the end, saying, 'Only what I say is true.' What's this all about!"

Girish (*to the doctor*): "Sir, you are now guilty of the same fault. You have the arrogance of all of them combined. When you point out their egotism, you are guilty of it yourself."

The doctor is silent.

Narendra (*to the doctor*): "We offer him worship bordering on divine worship."

Sri Ramakrishna laughs with delight, like a child.

Appendix I

Baranagore Math

Today is Monday, 9 May 1887, the second day of the dark fortnight of Jaishtha. Narendra and other devotees are in the monastery. Sarat, Baburam, and Kali have gone to Sri Kshetra.[1] Niranjan has gone to see his mother. M. is at the monastery.

The brothers of the Math are resting after the midday meal. The Elder Gopal is copying some songs into a music notebook.

It is afternoon. Rabindra enters like a madman, barefoot and wearing only half a black-bordered dhoti. His eyes are rolling like a madman's. They all ask, "What has happened?" Rabindra says, "Wait. I'll tell you everything in a little while – but I won't go back home. I will stay here with you. She's a traitor. What do you think of this? I had a drinking habit for five years, and I gave it up for her sake. That was eight months ago. Not a drop. She's betrayed my trust!"

The brothers of the monastery say, "Calm down, please. How did you get here?"

Rabindra: "I walked barefoot all the way from Calcutta."

The devotees ask, "Where is the other half of your dhoti?"

Rabindra says, "She tugged at it when I left and it got torn off."

---

1. Jagannath Puri, an ancient place of pilgrimage in Orissa state.

The devotees say, "Please go take a bath in the Ganges and cool off. Then we'll talk."

Rabindra belongs to a respectable Kayastha family of Calcutta. He is between twenty and twenty-two years old. He met Sri Ramakrishna at the Kali temple in Dakshineswar and received his special grace. Once he spent three nights with Thakur. He is a man of very gentle and sweet nature. Thakur showed him great affection but said, "It will take you some time. There is still some desire for sense enjoyments in you. Nothing is possible just now. The police can't do anything the very moment a theft takes place. When it quiets down a little, the police come and arrest the guilty."

Rabindra has become infatuated with a prostitute, but he has all the other virtues – compassion for the poor, contemplation of God, and so on. Learning that the woman was unfaithful to him, he arrives at the monastery in a torn dhoti and resolves not to return to the world.

Rabindra goes to the Paramanik Ghat for a bath in the Ganges. A devotee accompanies him, hopeful that the company of holy men will awaken the young man's spiritual consciousness. After the bath he takes Rabindra to the cremation ground near the ghat and shows him a dead body, saying, "The brothers of the monastery come here alone at night to meditate. It is good for us to meditate here. Here one sees clearly that the world is transitory." Hearing this, Rabindra sits down to meditate, but he cannot meditate for long. His mind is too restless.

Both men return to the monastery and bowed down to Thakur in the shrine. The devotee tells Rabindra that the brothers meditate in this room.

Rabindra sits to meditate for a while but cannot continue for long.

Mani: "How do you feel? Is your mind very restless? Is that why you got up? You probably couldn't concentrate properly."

Rabindra: "I am definitely not going back to the world. Even if my mind isn't settled down."

Mani and Rabindra stand in a quiet spot in the monastery. Mani tells a story from the life of Buddha: Buddha first attained spiritual awareness by listening to a song of some celestial maidens. These days the lives of Buddha and Chaitanya are continually discussed in the monastery. Mani sings:

> We long for peace, but where can it be found?
>
> Where we come from and where we go, we do not know.
>
> Again and again returning, with laughter and tears without end,
>
> We wonder all the while where our paths will lead.

That night Narendra, Tarak, and Harish return from Calcutta, where they had been invited to eat at a devotee's house. When they arrive, they say, "Oh, what a feast we had!"

Narendra, the brothers of the monastery, M., Rabindra, and others are all sitting in "the room of the demons."[1] Narendra hears Rabindra's news.

1. Danas; the monastic brothers were nicknamed "demons."

Grief-stricken man and Narendra's counsel

Narendra sings, as though to instruct Rabindra through the song:

Give up, O man, and cast aside any wrong advice.

You will be freed from your pain when you have known the Lord.

Narendra sings again as if advising Rabindra:

Aspiring soul, imbibe the bliss from Hari's cup of love, become intoxicated!

One's childhood is spent in play, and adulthood infatuated with woman.

In old age one falls prey to bodily ills and lies in bed from morning till dusk.

How can delusion be removed? As the musk deer roams the forest, not knowing

That the sweet-scented musk that draws it ever onward rests in its own navel,

So without the guru one's searches will be in vain.

After some time the brothers of the Math come into Kali Tapasvi's room.[1] Girish has just sent two of his new books to them, *Buddha Charita* and *Chaitanya Charita.* Narendra, Sashi, Rakhal, Prasanna, M., and some other devotees are present. Since coming to the new monastery (Baranagore), Sashi has devoted himself heart and soul to worshiping Thakur. They are all amazed at his devotion. In the same way that he served Thakur day and night during his illness, he now worships him single-mindedly with deep devotion.

1. Kali Tapasvi later became Swami Abhedananda. Tapasvi means ascetic.

One brother of the monastery reads from *Buddha Charita* and *Chaitanya Charita.* He reads *Chaitanya Charita* somewhat sarcastically. Narendra snatches the book away from him and says, "You spoil a good thing doing that!"

Narendra himself reads about Chaitanya Deva's showering of love.

A brother of the Math: "I say that nobody can give love to another."

Narendra: "Paramahamsa gave love to me."

Brother: "Are you sure you got it?"

Narendra: "What can you understand? You belong to the servant class.[1] All of you will serve me and massage my feet – even Sarat, Mitir, and Deso. (*All laugh*.) Don't flatter yourself that you've understood everything. (*Laughter*.) Go and prepare a smoke for me." (*All laugh*.)

Brother: "No… I will… not…"

M. (*to himself*): Sri Ramakrishna has infused mettle in many of the brothers of the monastery, not only in Narendra. Without such mettle is it possible to renounce "lust and greed"?

Spiritual practices of the monastic brothers

The next day is Tuesday, 10 May, the day of the Divine Mother. Narendra and the other brothers are going to offer a special puja to the Mother of the Universe. A triangular yantra (sacred diagram) has been drawn in front of Thakur's shrine. They will

1. God's servant class.

perform a homa,[1] followed by animal sacrifice. According to the Tantra both homa and sacrifice have to be performed. Narendra reads from the Gita.

Mani goes for a dip in the Ganges. Rabindra paces the roof all alone. He hears Narendra chanting melodiously:

Om, I am neither the mind, the intellect, the ego, nor the mind-stuff,

Nor I am the ears, the tongue, the nostrils, the eyes.

I am neither the sky nor earth nor fire nor air.

I am pure Knowledge and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva!

I am neither the life-breath nor the five vital forces;[2]

not the seven metals, not the five sheaths.[3]

Neither speech nor hands nor feet nor genitals nor anus am I.

I am pure Knowledge and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva!

I have neither attachment nor enmity, neither greed nor infatuation.

Neither vanity nor envy have I.

I have neither righteousness, wealth, desire, nor liberation.[4]

I am pure Knowledge and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva!

I know nothing of virtue and vice, nothing of happiness and sorrow.

---

1. Vedic sacrifice in which oblations are offered into fire.
2. The five "breaths": prana, apana, samana, vyana, and udana.
3. The five coverings of the atman: the physical body (annamayakosha), the life-force (pranamayakosha), the mental sheath (manomayakosha), the intelligent will (vijnanamayakosha), and the causal body (anandamayakosha).
4. Dharma, artha, kama, moksha – the four goals of human life.

I am neither mantra, nor place of pilgrimage, nor Veda, nor ritual;

Neither the eater of food, nor eating, nor food.

I am pure Knowledge and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva!

Rabindra returns after his bath in the Ganges. His dhoti is wet.

Narendra (*in a whisper, to Mani*): "He has just taken his bath. It's the right time to initiate him into sannyas. (*Mani and Narendra laugh*.)

Prasanna asks Rabindra to change and gives him a gerua dhoti.

Narendra (*to Mani*): "Now he's going to wear the cloth of renunciation."

Mani: "What kind of renunciation?"

Narendra: "Renunciation of 'lust and greed.'"

Rabindra puts on the ochre cloth and goes into Kali Tapasvi's room to sit there alone. Perhaps he will meditate for a while.

Appendix II

Letter from Aswini Kumar to M.

Sri Ramakrishna with Aswini Kumar and other devotees

Keshab Sen (1881), Devendranath Tagore, Achalananda, Shivanath, Hriday, Narendra, and Girish

Beloved brother M.,

I received the fourth part of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* sent by you on the day of Kojagar Purnima,[1] and finished reading it today, the second day of the lunar month. Blessed you are. You have showered nectar on the whole country.

Some time ago you wanted to know what conversations I had with Thakur. I shall try to tell you about them. But I am not as lucky as M., to be able to write down the day, the date, the position of planets, of my visits with him, and to account for all the words that poured from his holy lips. I write what I remember. It is possible that I mistake the date of one conversation with another. Besides, I don't remember everything.

The first time I met Thakur was probably during the autumn holidays of 1881. Keshab Babu was expected on that day. I went to Dakshineswar by boat. When I reached the ghat, I asked someone where the Paramahamsa was. Pointing to the northern verandah, to a person resting against a bolster, he said, "He's the Paramahamsa." Seeing

1. The full moon day of Lakshmi Puja.

him clad in a black-bordered cloth and resting against a bolster, I said to myself, "What kind of a paramahamsa is that?" But then I saw that he was half leaning against the big pillow with his hands holding his drawn-up knees. I said to myself, He doesn't know how to rest against a pillow like a gentleman. So maybe he is the paramahamsa." I saw a gentleman sitting to his right very near the pillow and was told that he was Rajendra Mitra, who later became the Assistant Secretary of the Bengal Government. There were many others sitting on his right. In a few minutes he said to Rajendra, "See if Keshab is coming." Only a short time before someone had come to tell him that Keshab was not there. Hearing a sound, he again said, "Just go see. Check again." This time too a person came back and said, "No." The Paramahamsa laughed and said, "Leaves rustle in the wind and Radha says, 'Here comes my beloved!' You know, Keshab has been doing this for a long time: he is coming; no, he hasn't come."

After some time, as evening approached, Keshab arrived with his group. He bowed low before Thakur and touched his forehead to the ground. Thakur did the same. When he raised his head, he was in samadhi. He said, "You have brought all the residents of Calcutta, as if I'm going to deliver a lecture. But I won't be able to do that. Do it yourself if you like. I can't do all that."

With a divine smile on his face, in the same state, he said, "I shall eat, I shall drink, I shall stay at your house. I shall eat, sleep, and defecate at your house. But I can't give lectures." Keshab Sen

gazed at him and was filled with emotion. He said again and again, "Ah, ah me."

Seeing this state of Thakur I thought, Is he pretending? I've never seen anything like this before. And you know what faith I have.

After coming down from samadhi, he said to Keshab, "Keshab, one day I went to your place and heard you say: 'Having dived into the river of God's love, we will reach the sea of Sat-chit-ananda.' Then I looked up [to where Keshab's wife and other ladies were sitting] and said to myself: 'Then what will happen to them?' You are householders. How will you fall so suddenly into the sea of Sat-chit-ananda? You are like a mongoose with a brick tied to its tail. Hearing just a little noise, it climbs up into its niche, but how can it stay there? That brick pulls it and it falls down to the ground. You householders can practice a little meditation and so on, but the brick of a wife and children will pull you down to earth again. You may dive into the river of love for a while, but you'll soon come up again. It will continue like this. How can you dive for good?"

Keshab said: "Isn't it possible for a householder? What about Maharshi Devendranath Tagore?"

The Paramahamsa Deva repeated "Devendranath Tagore, Devendra, Devendra" twice or thrice, bowed to him a few times, and said, "You know, there was a person who used to celebrate the worship of Durga and from morning till evening slaughtered goats as sacrifice to Her. Some years later there was not so much activity. Somebody asked the man, 'Sir, why is there no longer great hustle and bustle of sacrifice at your house?' He

replied, 'I've lost my teeth, you see.' Devendra now practices meditation and contemplation. That is natural. But there is no doubt he's a good man.

"Look here, as long as a man is under the spell of maya, he's like a green coconut. A piece of its shell comes off with the meat. But when delusion is gone, the shell and kernel become separated. Then they can easily be separated; the kernel sounds like a dry ball inside. When he is free from delusion, the soul and the body of a man become separate; there is no identification with the body.

"It is the 'I' that is the cause of all trouble. Will this rascal 'I' not go? In a dilapidated house an ashwattha tree sprouts. Even if you cut it down and throw it away, another branch shoots up the next day. It is the same with this 'I.' Wash the bowl an onion has been kept in any number of times. Can you ever get rid of its smell?"

While talking, he said to Keshab Sen, "Well, Keshab, your Calcutta gentlemen say there is no God. One of them is climbing up a staircase. He takes a step and as he takes another, he suddenly exclaims: 'Oh! What happened to my side?' and falls unconscious. His relatives call for a doctor, but before he arrives, the gentleman expires. Yet they say, 'There is no God!'"

After an hour or an hour and a half, devotional singing began. What I saw then I feel I shall never forget, even after many lives. Everyone began to dance, even Keshab. Thakur was in the middle and the others were dancing around him. While dancing, he suddenly became motionless, absorbed

in samadhi. He remained in this state for quite some time. After I saw him and heard his words, I felt, yes, he is truly a paramahamsa.

One day, perhaps in 1883, I took a number of young men from Srerampore to see him. Looking at them Thakur said "What has brought them here?"

I: "To see you."

Thakur: "What is there to see in me? Let them look at the buildings and temples."

I: "They have not come to see the buildings. They have come to see you."

Thakur: "Then they're flints – there is fire in them. You may keep a flint in water for a thousand years, but the moment it is struck, it will generate fire. These young men must be the same. As for me, you may strike hard, but no fire will come out."

We all laughed to hear these last words. I don't exactly remember any other conversation that day. But there was some talk that the shell of "I-ness" does not disappear, and about the renunciation of "lust and greed."

Yet another day that I visited him, after I had saluted him and sat down, he said, "Can you bring me some of that stuff that fizzes when you uncork it – a bit sour, but a little sweet?" I said, "Lemon soda?"

Thakur said, "Do bring some." I remember bringing him a bottle.

As far as I can recall we were alone. I asked him many questions.

I: "Do you believe in the distinction of caste?"

Thakur: "How can I say I do? I ate curry at Keshab Sen's house. But listen to what happened one day. Somebody with a long beard brought me some ice. I didn't feel at all like eating it. But later, when another person brought ice from the same man, I ate it with gusto. You see, the distinction of caste falls off by itself, just like fronds fall from coconut and palm trees when they grow. Caste distinction also falls like this. Don't pull them off; let them fall off by themselves."

I asked: "What do you think of Keshab Babu?"

Thakur: "I say, brother, he is a saintly man."

I: "And Trailokya Babu?"

Thakur: "He is a good man, sings very well."

I: "Shivanath Babu?"

Thakur: "A good man, but he argues."

I: "What is the difference between a Hindu and a Brahmo?"

He said: "There is no particular difference. In a serenade one person continues to play a particular note while another plays various melodies. One of the melodies is, 'My Radha is sulking.' Brahmos play just one note – the Formless. Hindus produce melodies of various kinds.

"Water and ice – one is without form, the other with form. That which is water becomes ice when it is cold. With the heat of knowledge, ice melts into water. In the cold of devotion, water turns into ice.

"The Reality is one and the same. Different people give It different names. It is like this: there are four ghats on the four sides of a pond. Some people take water from one and say they are taking *jal*. Those taking water at another place may say they are taking *pani*. At the third place they call it *water,* and at the fourth, they call it *aqua.* But it is the same water."

When I told him that I had met Achalananda Tirthavadhuta in Barisal, he said, "The same Ramkumar of Kotrang?"

I: "Yes, sir."

Thakur: "Well, what do you think of him?"

I: "I liked him."

Thakur: "Well, do you like him better than you like me?"

I: "How can you be compared with him? He is a pundit, a learned man. Are you a pundit, a jnani?"

Hearing this, he was speechless; he remained silent. After a minute or so, I said, "He may be a pundit, but you are fun, full of joy. There is a lot of fun in your company."

At this he smiled and said, "Well said. You are right."

He asked me, "Have you seen my panchavati?"

I answered, "Yes, sir."

He told me a little about what he used to do there. He told me about the various spiritual disciplines he had practiced, and also about Nangta

(the Naked one, Totapuri). I asked him, "How can I realize God?"

He: "You see, brother, He is pulling us the way a magnet pulls iron. But if mud covers the iron, it can't be pulled. When it is washed clean by weeping (for Him), you will immediately stick to Him."

I was recording Thakur's statements as I listened to him. He said, "Look here, it is not enough just to shout, 'Hemp, hemp!' Get some hemp, grind it in water, and then drink it." Then he said to me, "Since you live a householder's life, live a little inebriated. Let that glow continue even when you're engaged in work. You won't be able to be like Sukadeva who lay naked with intoxication.

"Since you're going to live in the world, you should write out a general power of attorney and give it to God. He will do whatever is necessary. Live like a maidservant in a rich household. How much she loves the children of her master! She bathes them, washes them, and feeds them as if they were her own. But she knows in her heart that they are not hers. As soon as her services come to an end, all contact is lost.

"Just as you rub your hands with oil before cutting open a jackfruit, cover yourself with the oil that will not allow you to become entangled in the world and affected by it."

All this time that we were talking, we were seated on the floor. Now he got up on his cot and lay on his back. He said to me, "Fan me."

I began to fan him. He remained quiet. After some time he said, "It is very hot, brother. Moisten

the fan with water." I said, "Oh, you are fond of good living too, I see!" He smiled and said, "Why not? Why shouldn't I?" I said, "Very well, then have as much as you want." The pleasure I had that day being near him I cannot express.

The last time I visited him – a day you mentioned in the third volume (Section XVI) – I went with the headmaster of my school. It was just after he had passed his B. A. You met him the other day. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw him, he said, "Where have you found him? He's a very fine fellow!"

Then he said: "Brother, you're a lawyer. You are very clever! Can you give me some of your cleverness? Your father came here the other day. He was here for three days."

I asked: "How did you find him?"

He said: "He's a good man, but sometimes he talks nonsense."

I said: "Knock off some of his nonsense the next time you see him."

He smiled a little. I said, "Please give me some special instruction."

He said: "Do you know Hriday (Hriday Mukhopadhyay)?"

I said: "Your nephew? I only know him by name."

Thakur: "Hriday used to say, 'Uncle, don't say everything you have to say all at once. Why should you repeat the same things over and over again?' I said, 'What does it matter to you, you rascal? These

are my words. I may repeat them a million times. What is that to you?'"

I smiled and said: "Quite right, quite right."

After some time he sat down and, repeating, 'Om, Om,' he began to sing:

> Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty….

Singing a couplet or two, and repeating, "Dive, dive," he himself dived deep.

The samadhi over, he began to pace up and down. He was wearing a dhoti. With both hands, he pulled it up to his waist. One end of it trailed on the ground, the other hung loose. My companion and I began to nudge each other and whisper, "He's wearing his dhoti nicely!" But in a little while he said, "Away, away, you rag of a cloth!" He threw it away and began pacing up and down naked. Bringing an umbrella and a walking stick from the northern side of the room, he asked, "Are these yours – this umbrella and the walking stick?" I replied, "No, sir," and he immediately said, "I already knew that. Just by looking at an umbrella and walking stick I can judge a man. Surely these belong to that fellow who swallowed my words without understanding them."

After a while he sat on the northern end of his cot facing west, still naked. He asked me, "Do you consider me uncivilized?"

I said: "No, you're very civilized. Why do you ask?"

Thakur: "Well, Shivanath and others like him think of me as uncivilized. When they come, I have to somehow wrap myself in this dhoti. Do you know Girish Ghosh?"

I: "Which Girish Ghosh? The one who runs a theatre?"

Thakur: "Yes."

I: "I've never seen him, but I know his name."

Thakur: "He is a good man."

I: "I hear he drinks. Does he?"

Thakur: "Let him. Let him. How long will he continue? Do you know Narendra?"

I: "No, sir."

Thakur: "I'd like you to meet him. He's passed his B.A. and hasn't married."

I: "Very well. I shall meet him."

Thakur: "Today there will be a kirtan[1] at Ram Dutta's house. You will meet him there. Please go there this evening."

I: "All right."

Thakur: "Will you go? You must definitely go."

I: "Would I disobey your order? I will certainly go."

He showed us the pictures in his room. Then he asked me, "Is a picture of the Buddha available?"

I: "I hear it's available."

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1. Community singing of hymns.

Thakur: "Bring me one."

I: "All right, I'll bring one the next time I come."

I never saw him after that day. I was not lucky enough to sit at his feet again.

That evening I went to Ram Babu's house where I met Narendra. Thakur was sitting in a room, resting against a bolster, with Narendra on his right. I was in front of them. He asked Narendra to talk to me.

Narendra said, "I have a bad headache today. I don't feel like talking."

I said, "Never mind. We'll talk another day."

That talk we had in Almora in the month of May or June of 1897.

Thakur's wish had to be fulfilled, though it took twelve years. Oh, what a happy time those few days in Almora with Swami Vivekananda were. Sometimes it was in his house, at other times in mine. And one day I was with him alone on a hilltop. I didn't see him again after this meeting. It was to fulfill Thakur's wish that I was able to meet him that time.

Sri Ramakrishna also I saw only four or five times. But even during that short time, I felt we were as close as if we had been classmates. How frankly we talked! The moment I left him, I said to myself, Oh my God, what a man I've been with! Whatever I saw, whatever I got from him during these few days has sweetened my entire life. With enormous care I have treasured that soft smile, that showering of divine words in my heart.

Brother, it is the inexhaustible wealth of a poor person. A grain of bliss flowing from that smile has brought gladness even to distant America. Thinking of this, I am overwhelmed again and again. If it is so with me, how fortunate you are!

M. (Mahendranath Gupta): Short Life of the Author

Mahendranath was born on Friday, 14 July 1854, 31st of Ashadha, 1261 B.Y., on the Naga Panchami day on Shiva Narayana Das Lane of Shimuliya, a neighborhood in Calcutta. Mahendranath's father was Madhusudan Gupta and his mother, Swarnamayi Devi. Madhusudan was a devotee of God; Thakur was aware of his devotion.

Mahendranath was the third child of Madhusudan. It is said that this son was born after his father performed mental worship to Shiva twelve times in succession. For this reason Madhusudan had a special affection for this son and he was particularly careful that the child not come to any harm. The boy Mahendra was extremely good-natured and had great love for his parents. He could recall many incidents from his early childhood – for example, going with his mother to the Car Festival of Mahesh when he was five years old. On the journey home he remembered the boat touching the Dakshineswar ghat. While everybody was busy visiting the deities in the temples, M. somehow became lost and found himself alone in the natmandir in front of the shrine of Bhavatarini Kali. Not able to find his mother, he began to cry. At that moment someone found him crying and consoled him. Mahendranath used to say that this incident always remained vivid in his mind. The brilliant radiance of the newly constructed and dedicated temple was clearly

seen in his mind's eye, and he thought that the person who came to console him was probably Thakur himself.

As a boy Mahendranath studied in the Hare School. He was a very bright student and always held first or second position in his class. The shrine of Mother Shitala of Thanthania was on his way to and from school – the shrine can now be seen in front of the College Street Market – and he never forgot to salute the deity. By virtue of his natural intelligence, together with hard work, he won scholarships and honours in his entrance, F.A., and B.A. examinations. He won second place in his entrance examination, and though he missed one of his mathematics papers, he placed fifth at the F.A. examination. In 1874 he stood third on his B.A. He was a favourite student of Prof. Tawny in the Presidency College.

In 1874, while still in college, he was married to Nikunja Devi, the daughter of Thakur Charan Sen and a cousin of Keshab Sen. Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother had great affection for Nikunja Devi. When she lost her son and became almost insane with grief, Thakur would bring peace to her mind by stroking her body.

Before he became a teacher, Mahendranath served for some time with the government and then in a merchant's office. But he could not stay with those jobs. Thakur had already arranged a different way of life for him. He took up teaching in school and college. In Ripon City and Metropolitan colleges, he taught English, psychology, and economics. When he started going to Thakur in

1882, he was headmaster of the Shyampukur branch of Vidyasagar's school.

Rakhal, Purna, Baburam, Binode, Bankim, Tejchandra, Kshirode, Narayan, and some other intimate devotees of Thakur were all students of M.'s school. That is why they all called him Master Mahashay (revered teacher). That is why he became famous in Sri Ramakrishna's group of devotees as "Master," or "Master Mahashay." Thakur also called him "Master" or "Mahendra Master."

Mahendranath was inclined toward religion from his boyhood. When Keshab Sen came into the public eye as a famous preacher and the founder of the Navavidhan [New Dispensation] Brahmo Samaj, Mahendranath became acquainted with him and would take part in the worship at the Navavidhan temple or at Keshab's home. At this time Keshab was his ideal. Later he would say that sometimes during worship Keshab would pray with such moving words that he looked godlike. Later, when he met Thakur and heard him speak, he realized that Keshab had derived his heart-warming charm from Thakur himself.

Mahendranath met Thakur at the Dakshineswar Kali temple on 26 February 1882. As soon as Thakur saw him, he recognized M. as a person eligible for divine knowledge. At the end of the first meeting, when M. was leaving, Thakur said to him, "Come again." But he expressed regret when he came to know that M. was married and had children. However, he also told him that there were very good signs on his forehead and eyes (fit

for a yogi). At the time Mahendranath liked to meditate on the formless Brahman. He did not like the worship of a deity in clay images.

M. was very well read in Western philosophy, literature, history, science, economics, and other subjects. He also was very well read in the Sanskrit Puranas and dramatic literature. He knew by heart verses from *Kumarasambhava, Shakuntala, Bhattikavya, Uttar Ramacharita,* and other dramatic works. He had studied Buddhist and Jain philosophies, as well as the Bible, particularly the New Testament. As a result, he considered himself a scholar.

But this pride received a blow on his first meeting with Thakur. Sri Ramakrishna showed him immediately the insignificance of the knowledge he had acquired and made him realize that real knowledge is to know God and that everything else is ignorance. Only a couple of blows from Thakur's words silenced Mahendranath. As Thakur would say, "A bullfrog is silenced forever after a croak or two when it falls a prey to a king cobra." So it happened with M.

During his very first meeting Thakur taught M. how to take care of both sides of life – the worldly and the spiritual – during one's life's journey. This is called "sannyasa in the household" or renunciation as a householder. The essence of it can be summed up: Do all your work but keep your mind in God; live with your wife, son, father, mother, and others; serve them, accepting them as your very own, but know in your heart that none of them is yours.

Just as an oyster floating on water receives a drop of rain when the Svati conjunction of stars is in the ascendant and then dives deep into the sea to make a pearl, M. followed this instruction of Thakur. He began to practice interior spiritual disciplines in solitude. He understood that the aim of human life is God-realization. He began his spiritual practices in solitude, and whenever he found time, he would go and sit at Thakur's feet. Lest he fall into the whirlpool of the world later, Thakur tested him from time to time and would ask him the reason if he did not come to see him.

Thakur knew from the very beginning that M. would narrate his story and teachings to people. If he became lost in the world and were to fall into the whirlpool of ignorance, he would not be able to tell it. He kept a keen eye on M. to see if some knot were forming within. When he made sure that M. had become careful, Thakur said to him, in January of 1884, "Now go and live at home. Let them know that you are their own, but be sure that you know in your mind that you are not theirs, nor are they yours." Throughout his life Mahendranath practiced this mantra of the renunciation of a householder. Thakur would often say, "Be in the world, but not of the world." He said to M., "Your eyes and forehead look like a yogi's come fresh from practicing spiritual austerity. You are an intimate companion of Chaitanya Deva. I recognized you from your reading of *Chaitanya Bhagavata*.

"You belong to the class of the perfect by nature. Do you know what you are? When Narada began to bestow the knowledge of Brahman on all (to Sanaka, Sanatana, and others), Brahma bound him

in maya with a curse. You will be able to recognize all people.

"You are my intimate companion. Were it not so, how could your mind be so interested in spiritual things when it lacked nothing worldly?

"Mother, do reveal Yourself to him again and again. Otherwise, how will he continue to attend to both sides? Let him do both: life in the world and renunciation. What is the need for him to renounce everything all at once? Yet may Your wish prevail. You may make him renounce all if that is Your will.

"Mother, awaken him. Otherwise, how can he awaken others? Why have you put him in worldly life? What would have been lost…? Narendra and Rakhal would stay away from women. You also will. You also will not be able to associate with women.... He is a deep soul, like the Phalgu river. He has real spirituality within.

"Your attitude is like Prahlada's – 'I am That' and 'I am God's servant.'

"The Master (M.) is very pure. He has no pride.

"You are my own, of the same substance, like father and son.

"You are the inner as well as the outer pillars of the natmandir."

A struggle continued to rage in Mahendranath's mind during his days with Thakur: Why have I not embraced sannyas? If he had become a monk, his mind could have soared like a free bird in the

firmament of divine consciousness.[1] Thakur would assure him from time to time by saying, "He who has renounced in the mind is a person of renunciation. Nobody who comes here is a householder. The householder devotees of Chaitanya Deva also lived with their family with detachment. The work you do does not involve that much worldliness."

Just as a weak child holds to his mother with all its strength when overwhelmed with fear, knowing that she is the main and a sure haven, Mahendranath held to Thakur in fear of the weaknesses born of family life – so much so that he absorbed himself in that feeling throughout his life. He talked of nothing but Thakur. He thought of Thakur as his only refuge, the most desirable goal, and the one aim in life. He had become one with Thakur. Thakur was his supreme attainment:

> yaṁ labdhvā cāparaṁ lābhaṁ manyate nādhikaṁ tataḥ |
> yasmin sthito na duḥkhena guruṇāpi vicālyate ||
>
> [And having gained that, he can think of no greater gain; established in that, he is not shaken by even the heaviest sorrow.]
>
> – Bhagavad Gita 6:22

Day and night M. taught the means to save oneself in the Kaliyuga: "Keep the company of the holy, practice spiritual disciplines in solitude at times, and have faith in the words of the guru."

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1. Chidakasha.

Those who saw him in his old age felt that here was a yogi, or a rishi, living as a householder for the purpose of showering the love of Sri Ramakrishna on them. Morning, afternoon, or evening – whenever one went to see him – one would find him in the company of devotees, talking about the love of God. Talk of God flowed continuously, from the Vedas, the Puranas, the Bible, the Koran, the holy books of the Buddhists, the Gita, the Bhagavata, the Adhyatma Ramayana. No weariness, no pause – unceasing talk about Thakur, the embodiment of all faiths and spiritual practices. What an extraordinary way of serving Thakur! He had dedicated his body, mind, and wealth, his all, to the work. Is this what is called the 'servant I' of Hanuman"?

Who would not like to be fortunate enough to be the servant of Sri Ramakrishna? His intimate disciples were, of course, his servants. M. also was markedly a servant of Sri Ramakrishna. "You are my own, of the same substance, like father and son" – these holy words of Thakur indicate this. Thakur himself had said that Narendranath would carry out his mission. He had often hinted that Mahendranath would also do his work. We find it in the Kathamrita at several places: "Mother, I can say no more. Please grant power to Ram, Mahendra, Vijay, and others, that they may carry out Your work from now on.

"Mother, why have You given him (M.) only one-sixteenth of Your power?[1] Oh, I understand, it will be enough for Your work." One day Sri

1. Kala Shakti.

Ramakrishna told him, "The Mother has kept the Bhagavata pundit (the preacher of the divine word) in the world, tying him with one bond. Otherwise, who would explain the Bhagavata?" Thus we see that, just as Narendranath had come for Thakur's work and Thakur gave him the badge of authority, Mahendranath also was not deprived of inheritance – he too got power and love from Thakur.

To make him competent to work for the welfare of mankind, Sri Ramakrishna made him undergo spiritual austerities from time to time. For more than a month, from 14 December 1883 to almost the middle of January 1884, he practiced continuous spiritual disciplines in Dakshineswar under the care of Thakur. While he lived with Thakur, not only did M.'s heart open out, but his pride was vanquished. Thakur used to say, "His pride has gone." Had he retained it, M. could not have accomplished the task assigned him by Thakur. This task was to disperse Thakur's words to others. Having kept himself hidden in the five volumes of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, M. has expressed Sri Ramakrishna fully. He gave himself a number of pseudonyms – Mani, Mohini, Mohan, a particular devotee, M., Englishman, and so on. The writer's own personality manifests nowhere at all. Only at some places does one come across his reflections. But even they are based on what Thakur had said and are merely an effort to explain Thakur's greatness. These thoughts and reflections are nothing but the image of Sri Ramakrishna in the pure heart of a disciple. This is how M. hid himself and why, after reading the Gospel in 1897, Swami Vivekananda wrote, "I now

understand why none of us attempted his life before. It has been reserved for you, this great work. Socratic dialogues are Plato all over. You are entirely hidden." Sri Keshab Gupta wrote, "Renouncing the temptation of being a literary figure is the hallmark of Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita. Like the spreading perfume of hidden tuberoses is the great beauty of this spiritual book."

That Thakur subjected M. to tests has been mentioned in the Kathamrita – 9 November 1884 – where it is obvious that this work of recording the Kathamrita had been reserved for him. Mahendranath had recorded his immortal words in his diary, while living in Thakur's company, with year, date, day of the week, and the lunar date. Taking these notes as a foundation, the Gospel and the five volumes of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* were written. Such work is unique in history – the life of a divine personality, an avatar, recorded in this way. It is unique. N. Ghosh correctly said about the words of *Sri Sri Kathamrita* in the *Indian Nation*: "They take us straight to the truth and not through a metaphysical maze. The style is Biblical in simplicity. What a treasure would it have been to the world, if all the sayings of Sri Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Nanak, Chaitanya could have been preserved thus."

Can anybody and everybody accomplish such a work? Even if they do, it cannot be with such pure fervour. It was possible only by the grace and desire of Thakur. That is why Thakur first rid the writer of his pride. Which is why Mahendranath hid

himself by taking up a number of pseudonyms found in the *Kathamrita*.

It is obvious from Mahendranath's words and attitude that he always felt himself to be a servant in Thakur's company. And he made of himself a sannyasin. He would often say, "We ought to have only one aim – to be as perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect."[1]

After Thakur's passing away, M. used to visit the Baranagore monastery now and then to live with his brother disciples, to firmly root in himself the ideal of service and spiritual discipline, renunciation, and austere life that they all aspired to. With the aim of cultivating a spirit of complete dependence on God, he would sometimes spend nights in front of the University of Calcutta Senate Hall, just like an indigent. Other times he would go to Uttar Pradesh to live in a hut[2] and practice austerities like a sadhu.

Now and then M. would go to the Howrah Station to watch people return from pilgrimage and he would salute them. He would ask for prasad from them and share it with his companions, saying 'Prasad brings one in contact with God."

Whenever he found time or the opportunity, Mahendranath would seek the company of Thakur in Dakshineswar or in the house of a devotee. Even during school recess, whenever Thakur went to a

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1. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" – Matthew 5:48.
2. The hut where he practised austerities still stands in Swarga Ashrama at Hrishikesh. He lived there for several months in 1912.

devotee's house, M. would go there to be with him. Once the results of the Shyampukur school were rather low because of his frequent visits to Sri Ramakrishna. Vidyasagar said cuttingly about him, "Master (M.) is busy with the Paramahamsa; he has no time to think of the school's affairs." As the remark involved his guru's name, M. immediately resigned his job. When Thakur came to know about it, he said, "You have done the right thing. The Divine Mother will take care of you."

Whenever Thakur was in need of anything, he would tell Mahendranath, adding at the same time, "I cannot accept from just anybody."

Mahendranath was very popular with Sri Ramakrishna's group of devotees for his goodness and simplicity of heart. When Narendranath was in straightened circumstances after the death of his father and was very anxious to carry out spiritual practices, Mahendranath arranged for his family's expenses for three months, thus enabling him to attend to his spiritual pursuit with a free mind, as directed by Thakur. At times Mahendranath would also go secretly to Narendranath's mother to render some help.

After Sri Thakur's mahasamadhi, his devotees established a monastery at Baranagore. In the beginning Suresh Mitra, Balaram Bose, and M. helped it financially. At the time Mahendranath was teaching in two schools. He donated his income from one school to the monastery.

Narendranath lived the life of a wandering monk from 1890 to 1893. Inspired by his example, some of his brother disciples went to the Himalayas

or to Uttarkhanda to carry out spiritual practices. During this time Mahendranath remained absorbed in his diaries day and night, and meditated on Thakur, taking refuge at the feet of the Holy Mother. Whenever a conflict arose in his mind, he would give himself up completely to the Holy Mother. He would also bring her to his house and serve her there. She would stay at Mahendranath's house for more than a fortnight, sometimes for more than a month. As directed by Thakur in her dream, the Holy Mother went to the house of Mahendranath to install the holy water vessel with her own hands and to arrange for its worship. Holy Mother performed much worship, repetition of the name, and meditation in this shrine.

Since 1889 and on a regular basis M. provided money for the service of the Holy Mother. Whenever she was in need of anything, she informed Mahendranath. When a piece of land was to be bought for worship of the Mother of the Universe (Jagaddhatri), she asked Mahendranath to send money. Upon receipt of the letter, he sent Rs. 320/-. Once, when water became scarce in her village and he was asked to send money to dig a well, Mahendranath sent Rs. 100/-. M. also used to send money to the monks of the monastery when they wanted to go on pilgrimage or to the hills for spiritual practise.

M. received a number of requests to publish this book. When more and more requests poured in and at Holy Mother's request, M. one day read it to her. She was extremely pleased to hear it. Blessing M.

she said, "Hearing it from your lips, I felt as if Thakur himself was talking." And she directed M. to publish the book.

In 1897 Mahendranath published the first edition of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (According to M., a son of the Lord and Disciple).* Thus the Gospel became known in English. Sri Ramchandra Dutta wrote in the *Tattva Manjari* published from Yogodyan, in the month of Agrahayana, 1304 B.Y. (November-December, 1897):

"Revered Mahendranath Gupta … who has so much faith in the Lord that he is making as much effort as is humanly possible to spread Sri Ramakrishna's words in a book for the good of the common man…. Our request to Gupta Mahashay is that, instead of bringing these teachings in separate editions, he publish them in one big volume. It would be of greater service to mankind.

"Our second request is that he not give up writing in the Bengali language, because the essence of the words is somewhat changed in several places by translation into English. Master Mahashay knows this very well. The ordinary man of this country will find it difficult to understand if it is in English."

And that is how it happened later. Bearing the name of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* by Sri M., it began to appear in *Tattva Manjari, Banga Darshan, Udbodhan, Hindu Patrika*, and some other monthly magazines of the time. They were collected and published as Volume I through the Udbodhan Press by Swami Trigunatitananda. The

second volume appeared in 1904, the third in 1908, the fourth in 1910, and the fifth in 1932. The work has been translated into many languages, both Indian and foreign. Everybody began to say, "An invaluable gem is being added to Bengali literature." The *Nava Bharat* wrote: "Except for M., nobody possesses this gem." The *Sanjivani* wrote: "*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* is truly a treasure of nectar." Romain Rolland, the savant, wrote: "The exactitude is almost stenographic."

With the publication of the *Kathamrita*, new and more devotees began to visit the monastery and Holy Mother's house. New and more sannyasins began to read the *Kathamrita*. The Ganges of peace began to flow in the world of trial and tribulation.

Swami Premananda wrote: "Thousands of people are finding new life from the *Kathamrita*, thousands are receiving bliss from it. Bent under the weight of the trials and sufferings of worldly life, many thousands of people are gaining peace in their family life of sorrow and attachment."

All recognized that Sri Ramakrishna, the incarnation of the age, had incarnated for the good of humanity and that man will attain peace and gain fearlessness by taking shelter at his feet.

Presiding at M.'s birth anniversary in 1955, Hemendra Prasad Ghosh said: "M. has presented Sri Ramakrishna to the world through his *Kathamrita* in a very short time. Had he not written the *Kathamrita*, it would have taken much longer for the world to know Sri Ramakrishna.

That God can be realized even while living in the household – the truth taught by Sri Ramakrishna – is clearly manifest in M."

Many western devotees also used to meet M. at his house. M. would talk only of his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, day after day, month after month, and year after year continuously. He would say, "I am an insignificant person, but I live by the side of an ocean, and I keep with me a few pitchers of sea water. When a visitor comes, I entertain him with that. What else can I speak of but his words?"

He would speak in such a touching and affectionate manner that it appeared to the visitors that they were hearing these words sitting close to Thakur himself. It was as if a bridge had been built between the spot where he sat and talked about Thakur and the scenes of Thakur's life itself. His narratives seemed real. Paul Brunton narrated his meeting with Mahendranath in his book *Search in Secret India.* Describing his first meeting with M., he writes, "A venerable patriarch has stepped out from the pages of the Bible and a figure from Mosaic times has turned to flesh."

Swami Yogananda, in his book *Autobiography of a Yogi,* recorded how he was inspired by Mahendranath in the early years of his spiritual life: "Mahendranath was a sannyasin-in-the-household. His life is a shining illustration of renunciation. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* by M. is not only an excellent piece of literature, but also the immortal words of a divine life."

Many young men embraced monastic life by coming in contact with Mahendranath, and from

him they found new inspiration in religious life. Even those who saw him only once never forgot his yogi-like figure, his humility, and his simplicity.

When the translation of some chapters of the *Kathamrita* appeared as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Volume II – and was also published in the *Morning Star* without M.'s permission and consultation – how hurt M. felt. This is evident from his letter: "Dear Ayukta Babaji, My love and salutations to you all. The translation of the *Gospel* in the *Morning Star* is, I regret to say, not satisfying to me. Being an eyewitness, I naturally want the spirit to be kept in the translation. Moreover, the report of a meeting should not appear in a mutilated form. The translation should be done by myself. You may do the work after my passing away, which is by no means a distant contingency. I am 76 and my health is not at all good. It is painful to see the Gospel presented in this way. I do not approve the translation which has appeared as Volume II from Madras…."

Mahendranath never made disciples; he never initiated anyone. He tried to follow each and every word of Thakur literally. He was not a fanatic – in all religions he saw the "harmonizing image" of Sri Ramakrishna. He spent his whole life, as though a life-long vow, in spreading the divine words of Thakur.

Mahendranath Dutta[1] in his book *Master Moshayer Anudhyan* wrote:

1. Brother of Swami Vivekananda.

"He (M.) believed that the guru and the spiritual ideal[1] are one – the guru is the ideal and the ideal is the guru. They are one and the same. By discussing and meditating on Sri Ramakrishna, thinking of him, constantly remembering him and talking about him, M. was filled inwardly with Ramakrishna, though outwardly he was Mahendranath Gupta. He tried to be one with Sri Ramakrishna by giving up his own individuality and independent thinking. He retained no other thought, no ideas of his own. That which is called a fiery independent spirit or self-assertion in English, he gave up entirely. Within he was all Ramakrishna. His main objective in life seems to have been to live as a reflection of Sri Ramakrishna. So I say that having given up his independent thinking, his own individuality and personal views, he became one with his guru. The instructions of the guru, his words, were the only subjects of his thought. Of course, while attending to his worldly duties or teaching at the school – that is to say, work of a lower plane – he did retain his individuality and independent thinking. But even in such work, the impact of Sri Ramakrishna and his views were quite evident. So I say that Master Mahashay was Sri Ramakrishna within and Mahendranath Gupta without."

During the lifetime of Sri Ramakrishna, Mahendranath was first among the devotees to visit the native village of his guru. For him it became the holiest place of pilgrimage. Taking every spot there as holy, he lay prostrate on the

1. Ishtam.

ground. And he brought back some earth from this place as a sacred reminder. Hearing this, Thakur said, "Nobody asked you to do this, you did it of your own accord." Shedding tears of joy and touching his head and body, he blessed M. and said, "Collecting earth shows love and devotion."

Mahendranath felt unspeakable joy in touching the image of Jagannath in Puri and Tarakanath in Tarkeshwar as Thakur wished him to do. Hearing of it, Sri Ramakrishna touched Mahendranath's hand and said, "You are pure."

Whenever M. began writing *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* for the purpose of publishing it, he would observe acts of purity and take only one meal a day – boiled rice with clarified butter.[1] Until the very day of the publication of the book, he followed these practices. At the time of publication of the fifth volume, M. left his mortal frame.

Thakur used to say, "Bhagavata-bhakta-Bhagavan[2] are one and the same." That is why, whenever the character of Mahendranath, the devotee, is discussed, it is mostly related to *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. The recorder of word lives forever along with the word. Thus has Mahendranath also attained immortality. As long as the name of Sri Ramakrishna remains alive in this world, his Bhagavata, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, will also live, and with it will live M.

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1. Havishya.
2. Scripture-devotee-Lord.

It was during the night of 4 June 1932, the 20th Jaishtha that Mahendranath fell ill after completing the writing of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, Volume V. The following morning, a Saturday, at six o'clock, repeating the names of Sri Thakur and Holy Mother, and with this last prayer on his lips, "O Gurudeva, Mother, take me in your lap," this highest of yogis left his body. He was seventy-eight. It was like the departure of a great yogi, as if he had just fallen asleep.

The last rites on the holy body of Sri M. were performed in the cremation ground at Cossipore, to the right of the spot where Sri Thakur's body was cremated. Ever a servant of Thakur, and at the end Mahendranath found a place close to him. Many intimate devotees of Sri Ramakrishna had left this world of maya before the demise of Mahendranath, but this precious piece of land seemed to have been reserved by Thakur for this beloved servant-disciple.

At that time there was a platform of white marble where Thakur's body had been cremated. M.'s two worthy sons – Prabhas Chandra Gupta and Charu Chandra Gupta – bore almost all the expenses for building a common canopy over both Sri Thakur and Master Mahashay.

Bengali Publisher

Section I

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra and other Intimate Disciples in Dakshineswar

Chapter I

The story of Thakur's earlier life – Sri Ramakrishna in his first ecstasy of love in 1858

The devotee Krishnakishore, a sadhu from Ariadaha, Jatindra, Jaya Mukherji and Rani Rasmani

Sri Ramakrishna is in a happy state of mind today. Narendra has come to the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar. Other intimate disciples are there as well. Narendra takes his bath and receives prasad[1].

It is Monday, 16 October, 1882, the fourth day of the bright fortnight of Aswin. The Durga Puja falls on Thursday next, the seventh day of the lunar month.

Rakhal, Ramlal and Hazra are with Sri Ramakrishna. Narendra is accompanied by one or two Brahmo youths. M. is also present.

Narendra has taken his meal with Sri Ramakrishna. After the meal, Sri Ramakrishna asks for bedding to be spread on the floor of his room. The devotees, particularly Narendra, will rest there. A mat of superior quality is spread out with a quilt and a pillow over it. Like a child, Sri Ramakrishna sits near Narendra on the bedspread. Turning toward him joyfully, he talks with the devotees, particularly Narendra. A radiant smile plays on his face. During

[1] Sacramental food which has been offered to the deity

the conversation, he tells them of incidents in his life and his spiritual state.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra and others) — After this spiritual state of mine, I only longed to hear about the Lord. I used to wander about trying to find out where the *Bhagavata*, the *Adhyatma (Ramayana)* or the *Mahabharata* was being read. I used to go to Krishnakishore of Ariadaha to listen to the recitation of the *Adhyatma*.

"What faith Krishnakishore had! Once when he was in Vrindavan, he felt thirsty and went to a well. He found a man standing near it. When asked to draw some water for him, the man said, 'I belong to a low caste and you are a brahmin. How can I draw water for you?' Krishnakishore said to him, 'Just say Shiva twice. The moment you say Shiva, you will be purified.' The man uttered, 'Shiva, Shiva,' and drew some water. Such an orthodox brahmin and he took that water! What faith!

"A sadhu came to the bathing ghat at Ariadaha. I thought I would go to see him one day. I told Haladhari in the Kali Temple that I would go to meet the sadhu with Krishnakishore. I asked him if he would like to see him. Haladhari said, 'What use is it to see a cage of clay?' You see, Haladhari reads the *Gita* and the Vedanta philosophy. That is why he called the sadhu a 'cage of clay'. I told Krishnakishore about it. He was quite angry and said, 'What! Did Haladhari say that? One who meditates on the Lord, thinks of Rama, and has given up everything for His sake, to call the body of such a man a cage of clay! He doesn't know that the body of such a devotee is made up of Spirit.' He was so angry that when he would come to the Kali Temple to pick flowers, he would turn away when he saw Haladhari and did not talk to him.

"He said to me, 'Why did you cast off your sacred thread?' When I was in that state, everything blew away from me as if by the cyclone of Aswin. No indication of my previous life remained! I lost external awareness! Even my *dhoti*[1] fell off, so how could I care for the sacred thread? I said to him, 'If you once experience that madness for the Lord, you will understand.'

"And this is what happened. He, himself, went into God-intoxication. He just uttered, 'Om, Om,' shutting himself in a room without another word. Thinking that it was a disease of the brain, a Kaviraj[2] of Natagore was sent for. Krishnakishore said to him, 'My good brother! Do please cure me of my disease, but not of my Om[3]!'

"One day when I went to see him, he was in a pensive mood. 'What is the matter?' I asked him. He said, 'The Tax man came and I am thinking about what he said – that if I do not pay with cash immediately, he will sell my utensils.' I said, 'What is the use of thinking about it? All he can do is to take away your utensils. Even if he carries them away tied together, he cannot carry you with him. You are *kha* (ether)!' (Narendra and others laugh.) Krishnakishore says that he is like ether. You see, he studies the *Adhyatma* (*Ramayana*). I used to joke with him, sometimes calling him *kha*. I laughed and said, 'You are *kha*. The Tax man will not be able to carry you away.'

"During ecstasy, I would tell the truth to everybody. I did not care about one's position and was not afraid of men of power.

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[1] Long cloth for covering the body
[2] An Ayurvedic physician
[3] Omkar, the Vedic symbol for the Supreme Being

"One day Jatindra came to Jadu Mallick's garden. I was there. I asked him, 'What is man's duty? Isn't it to meditate on God?' Jatindra said, 'We are worldly people. Is there salvation for us too? Even King Yudhisthira had to visit hell.' I felt very angry. I said, 'What kind of man are you! You only remember Yudhisthira's visit to hell and you forget his truthfulness, his readiness to pardon, his forbearance, discrimination, dispassion and love for the Lord.' I was going to say much more when Hriday stopped me. He put his hand on my mouth. A short time later Jatindra left, saying that he had some business to attend to.

"Many days later I went with Captain[1] to Sourindra Tagore's house. Seeing him, I said, 'I cannot call you a raja or anything like that because it would be a lie.' He talked with me for awhile, then Western visitors began to arrive. He is a man of rajasic nature. He keeps himself busy with so many things. Word of my visit was sent to Jatindra, but he sent a message that he had a sore throat.

"In the same state of God-intoxication, I saw Jaya Mukherji one day at the Baranagore *ghat*[2]. He was performing *japa*[3] but his mind was elsewhere. I approached him and gave him two slaps.

"One day Rasmani came to the Kali Temple. She used to come for worship and would ask me to sing a song or two. This particular day I was singing, when I noticed that she was sorting flowers but her mind was elsewhere. I at once slapped her twice. Then she sat there anxiously and confused, with her hands folded.

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[1] Colonel Viswanath Upadhyaya, a resident of Nepal. The advocate and emissary of the king of Nepal and his representative in Calcutta. A very orthodox brahmin and a great devotee.

[2] A brick landing stair on the bank of a river, a pond, or a reservoir

[3] Repetition of the Name

" 'Brother, what kind of temperament have you developed?' Haladhari asked. What was I to do? I prayed and prayed to the Mother and freed myself from the tendency to correct people."

With Mathur on pilgrimage in 1868 – Sri Ramakrishna weeps on hearing worldly talk in Kashi

"When I was in that state, I liked to hear nothing but talk of the Lord. If I heard worldly talk, I would sit silently and weep. Mathur Babu had taken me with him on pilgrimage. We stayed for many days in Raja Babu's house in Kashi. One day I was sitting with Mathur Babu in the drawing room. Raja Babu was also there with his men. I noticed that they were talking about worldly things: so much money was lost, and so on. I began to weep, 'Mother, where have you brought me? I was so well off in Rani Rasmani's temple. That I should hear of 'lust and greed' even in holy places!' There [in Dakshineswar] I did not have to listen to such worldly talk.'

Sri Ramakrishna asks the devotees, particularly Narendra, to rest awhile. He himself lies down on the smaller cot.

Chapter II

Enjoys the kirtan with Narendra and others – full of love, he embraces Narendra

It is afternoon. Narendra is singing. Rakhal, M., Narendra's Brahmo friend, Priya, and Hazra are there.

Narendra sings a devotional song to the accompaniment of *mridanga* (drum).

Meditate upon Hari, O my mind! He is the essence of consciousness. He is free from all impurity!

Without equal is His glory, beautiful is His shape, how very beloved is He in the hearts of His devotees!

Behold, His beauty is enhanced by fresh manifestations of love! It casts into shadow the effulgence of a million moons!

Verily, lightning flashes out of His glorious beauty! His blessed vision causes the hair to stand on end.

Worship His holy feet in the lotus of your heart. Gaze upon the matchless beauty of that beloved form.

Now that the mind enjoys peace and the eyes are filled with love, be immersed in divine love. Inspired with your devotion, remain merged in the joy of love.

Narendra sings again –

Satyam Shivam Sundaram[1] manifests Itself in the temple of the heart.

When shall my mind remain immersed night and day in the sea of this Beauty? (When shall that day come, O Lord, dispenser of the destiny of the lowly?)

When, O Lord, will knowledge divine grow in my heart, and this restless mind become dumbfounded and take shelter at Your feet?

Just as the *chakora*[2], on seeing the moon, begins to frolic with joy,

In the same manner, bliss-like embodied nectar will rise in the firmament of my heart and I, too, O Lord, will become intoxicated in Your light.

When, O friend of my soul, will this mind rest at the holy feet of the King of kings?

At Thy matchless feet of peace and Absolute good, the end of my life will be realized!

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[1] Absolute Truth, Absolute Good and Absolute Beauty are one

[2] A red-legged partridge which enjoys moonbeams

And when shall I be worthy of the delight of paradise in this very body, in this very life?

O Lord, seeing Your pure and sinless form, seeing Your radiance, the darkness of sin is dispelled like darkness by light.

O the friend of the lowly, pray light in my heart a burning faith like the polestar and fulfill my desire.

When shall that day come when, constantly looking on Him, my mind shall dive deep in the sea of that Divine Beauty?

Having attained You, I will remain merged night and day in the joy of love and forget myself.

But when will such a day dawn?

Song –

Repeat the sweet name of the Lord with joy and gladness!

Waves will rise on the sea of the nectar of His name. Drink it ceaselessly and give it to others.

When your mind goes dry, falling into illusory things of the world, sing His name and glory and fill it with the nectar of love.

Take care lest you forget that great mantra. Call upon the all-compassionate Father in adversity.

Come, shouting, 'Victory to Brahman, victory to Brahman,' and break the bonds of sin.

Becoming a practitioner of the yoga of love, become intoxicated with the joy of Brahman and attain your goal.

The kirtan continues with the accompaniment of the *mridanga*[1] and cymbals. Narendra and other devotees sing the kirtan, forming a circle around Sri Ramakrishna. Now they sing – 'Get absorbed in the

[1] Drum

nectar of divine love.' Occasionally they sing – 'Satyam Shivam Sundaram manifests Itself in the temple of the heart.'

At last, Narendra himself takes the *khol* (drum) and, full of emotion, sings along with Thakur: 'Repeat the sweet name of the Lord with joy and gladness.'

When the song ends, Sri Ramakrishna embraces Narendra a long time, saying, "Oh, what joy you have given me today!"

Today a fountain of love is welling up in Thakur's heart. It is about eight in the evening. He is pacing the verandah alone, intoxicated with divine love. Coming to the long northern verandah, he paces it from one end to the other. At times, he talks with the Divine Mother. Then he exclaims like one mad, "What [harm] can you do to me?"

Maya can do no harm to him who has the Divine Mother to protect him. Is this what he is saying?

Narendra, M. and Priya are going to spend the night. Sri Ramakrishna is beside himself with joy that Narendra will stay with him. Supper is ready. The Holy Mother is in the Nahabat[1]. Having prepared the supper with *chapattis* (Indian bread), gram lentils etc., she has sent for the disciples to come and eat their supper. The disciples stay here off and on. Surendra bears the expenses every month. The verandah to the southeast of Sri Ramakrishna's room is being made ready for eating.

Narendra and others are forbidden to talk of the school or any such matter

Narendra and others talk as they stand at the eastern door of the room.

[1] Music tower

Narendra — Don't you see what the boys of today have become?

M. — They are not bad, but no religious instruction is given to them.

Narendra — My observation is that their behavior is going downhill. They are flippant and vulgar, they show off and play truant. I have even seen them visiting places of ill repute.

M. — When I was a student, I never heard or saw such things.

Narendra — You apparently didn't keep company with such boys. I have seen them call other people vulgar names. Who knows what people they might be meeting!

M. — It is strange!

Narendra — I know many whose character has been lost. I wish the school authorities and their guardians had kept an eye on them.

Talk on God is the real talk – *atmanam va vijantha anya vachan vimumchatha*[1]

As they converse, Sri Ramakrishna comes from the room and says laughingly, "I say, what are you people talking about?" Narendra replies, "We are talking about the school. Boys today are losing their character." Sri Ramakrishna listens for awhile and then says to M. gravely, "It is not good to talk about these things. No talk is right except talk about the Lord. You are older than he, and you are intelligent.

[1] Know that Self alone and discard all other talks. Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.5

You should not have allowed him to raise such topics." (Narendra is around 19 or 20, M. is about 27 or 28.)

M. is embarrassed. Narendra and the other devotees keep quiet.

Sri Ramakrishna smiles as he stands and feeds Narendra and the others. He is very happy today.

Having taken their meal, Narendra and the other devotees go to Thakur's room. Sitting on the floor, they rest and talk with him. It is a mart of joy. During the conversation, Thakur says to Narendra, "Do please sing that song: 'The full moon of divine love rises on the firmament of divine wisdom.' "

Narendra begins to sing. Soon the other devotees begin to play on the drum and cymbals in accompaniment.

Song –

The full moon of divine love rises on the firmament of divine wisdom.

The ocean of love overflows: O how full of joy is the Lord!

(Victory unto Thee, merciful Lord! Victory! Victory!)

In all the four directions the planets of devotees twinkle.

The Lord, the friend of the devotees, is joyfully enacting His *lila*[1] with them.

(Victory unto Thee, merciful Lord! Victory! Victory!)

Behold, the gate of heaven is wide open and the vernal, joyful breeze of new dispensation arises,

Carrying the fragrance of divine love all around. It makes yogis drunk with the joy of communion.

(Victory unto Thee, merciful Lord! Victory! Victory!)

[1] Divine sport

On the sea of the universe is the lotus of the new dispensation, upon which is seated in Her majesty the Divine Mother, the embodiment of all joy!

The devotees, like a swarm of bees, drink its nectar with great fervour!

Behold the gracious countenance of the Mother! Behold, it delights the heart, it fascinates the universe!

Falling at Her feet are bands of holy men, singing and dancing, drunk with joy.

What beauty unparalleled! The blessed vision restores life to the dying soul.

Premdas, holding the feet of all devotees, says, "Sing, O brothers. Sing, 'Victory to the Mother.' "

Thakur dances as he sings, surrounded by devotees who also begin to dance.

After the kirtan Sri Ramakrishna begins to pace up and down the northeastern verandah. Hazra Mahashay is sitting on the northern part of the verandah talking to M. Thakur goes there and sits down. He asks a particular devotee, "Do you sometimes dream?"

The Devotee — I did have a very strange dream: of water, water everywhere in the universe. What an immense, limitless sheet of water it was! A number of boats were sailing on it. Suddenly, they sank into the rising waves. I, and a number of other people, got into a ship. And lo! I saw a brahmin walking over that shoreless sea. I asked him, 'How can you walk on deep water?' The brahmin smiled and said, 'It is not difficult. There is an unbroken bridge underneath me.' 'Where are you going?' I asked. 'To Bhawanipur,' he answered. I said, 'Stop for awhile. Let me accompany you.'

Sri Ramakrishna — My hair stands on end to hear this.

The Devotee — The brahmin said, 'I am in a hurry. It is not yet time for you to disembark! Let me go. Mark this path. You may tread it later on and follow me.'

Sri Ramakrishna — My hair stands on end hearing it. You should get initiated soon.

It is 11:00 p.m. Narendra and other devotees will sleep in Thakur's room on bedding spread over the floor.

On waking up in the morning, the devotees see Sri Ramakrishna, naked like a child, pacing up and down, chanting the names of the various gods. Sometimes he gazes at the Ganges, sometimes he goes to the pictures of the gods hanging on the wall and offers his obeisance, and sometimes he sings hymns in a very sweet voice. At times he says, "Thou art the *Veda*, the *Purana*, the *Tantra*, the *Gita*, the Gayatri, the *Bhagavata*, the bhakta and Bhagavan." Referring to the *Gita*, he says again and again, "*Tagi*[1], *tagi*, *tagi*, *tagi*." And sometimes he says, "Thou art Brahman, Thou art Shakti (Divine Power); Thou art Purusha[2]; Thou art Prakriti[3]; Thou art *virat*[4]; Thou art *svarata*[5]; Thou art *Nitya* (the Absolute); Thine is the whole *lila*; Thou art the twenty-four cosmic principles."

In the meanwhile, early morning *arati*[6] has started in the temples of Kali and Radhakanta. Conch shells sound and bells are ringing. The disciples wake up to see that flowers are being

[1] Tagi means a renouncer. It is formed by reversing the word "Gita".
[2] The Self, the Absolute, Spirit. Pure Consciousness, the witness of the changes of Prakriti
[3] Primordial Nature, composed of the gunas, the material of the universe of mind and matter
[4] Personified vastness
[5] One who is self-illumined and illumines others
[6] Singing of devotional songs along with waving of lights before the sacred images

collected from the Kali Temple flower garden for worship of the gods. The morning sacred music from the Nahabat floats over the area.

Narendra and the other devotees finish their morning ablutions and meet Sri Ramakrishna. He stands next to his room on the western corner of the northeastern verandah, his face beaming with a smile.

Narendra — I have noticed a number of sadhus belonging to the sect of Nanak seated in the Panchavati.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, they arrived yesterday. (To Narendra) I would like to see you all seated together on the mat.

All the devotees sit down on the mat. Sri Ramakrishna looks at them with delight and talks to them. Narendra raises the topic of sadhana (spiritual disciplines).

Practicing spiritual disciplines in the company of women prohibited for Narendra and others – sadhana done in the attitude of a son is extremely pure

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra and others) — Bhakti, or love of God, is the essence. When you develop love for Him, discrimination and dispassion come by themselves.

Narendra — Well, the *Tantra* talks of sadhana in the company of women.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is not a good path. It is very difficult and often brings about the downfall of the aspirant. Spiritual disciplines can be practiced with the attitude of a hero, a maidservant, or even the attitude of a mother to a child. I have the attitude of a child to his

mother. The attitude of a maidservant is also good. The path of sadhana with the attitude of a hero is very difficult. The attitude of a child is very pure.

The sadhus belonging to the sect of Nanak salute Thakur saying, "Namo Narayana[1]!" Thakur asks them to take their seats.

Everything is possible with God – miracles

Sri Ramakrishna says, "Nothing is impossible for God. Nobody can describe His real nature. All is possible for Him. There were two yogis practicing sadhana. The sage Narada passed by. Knowing him to be Narada, one of them asked, 'Are you coming from Narayana? What is He doing?' Narada said, 'I saw that He was passing camels and elephants back and forth through the eye of a needle.' One of the yogis said, 'What is there to marvel at? Everything is possible for Him.' The other yogi replied, 'Oh, no. That is impossible. You have never been there.' "

It is about nine in the morning. Thakur is seated in his room when Manomohan from Konnagar arrives with his family. He bows to Sri Ramakrishna. "I am taking my family to Calcutta," he says. Thakur makes kind enquiries and then says, "Today is the first *Agastaya*[2] and you are going to Calcutta. What can I say, brother?" Saying this, he smiles a little and resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna instructs Narendra to become absorbed in meditation

Narendra and his friends return after bathing in the Ganges. Sri Ramakrishna says to Narendra with

[1] Salutations to the Lord

[2] The first day of the month of Bhadra. It is considered an inauspicious day for making a journey because Agastaya Muni set out for his journey to the south from Vindyachal on this day of Bhadra never to return.

great eagerness, "Go to the banyan tree and meditate on the Lord. Shall I give you an *asana* (mat)?"

Narendra and his Brahmo friends sit at the foot of the banyan tree in the Panchavati. It is around half past ten in the morning. Soon Sri Ramakrishna and M. arrive. Thakur begins to talk to the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Brahmo devotees) — At the time of meditation, you must become absorbed in Him. Can you reach the precious stones at the bottom of the sea by floating on the surface?

Saying so, Thakur begins to sing in his sweet voice.

Song –

O my mind, dive deep, taking the name of Kali on your lips – dive into the deep waters of the heart, where the precious stones lie.

If you do not reach the treasure by diving three or four times, it does not mean that the sea of the heart has no treasures within.

Dive with all your might but once, O mind. In the sea of jnana, of *Kulkundalini*[1], lie pearls of peace.

By your bhakti and wishing for Shivayukti (union with Shiva), you will reach them.

In this sea, there are six alligators – of lust and the rest – always moving about looking for food.

Smear your body with the turmeric of discrimination. The smell of turmeric will keep them away from you.

Many are the precious gems that lie scattered at the bottom of the sea.

Says Ramprasad, "Jump into the sea and you shall get them."

[1] Kundalini; the serpent power

The Brahmo Samaj – lectures and social reforms – first attain the Lord and then preach

Narendra and his friends come down from the terraced platform and stand close to Thakur, who talks to them as they proceed south to his room.

"Alligators can catch you when you dive," Sri Ramakrishna says. "But when your body is smeared with turmeric, they won't touch you. In the sea of the heart there are six alligators, those of lust and the other passions. But when you rub your body with the turmeric of discrimination and dispassion, they cannot touch you."

"What will learning and lecturing avail one if he does not have discrimination (*viveka*) and dispassion (*vairagya*)? The Lord is the only Reality and all else is transitory; only He is real, all else is unreal – this is called discrimination.

"First install Him in the temple of your heart. Speeches and lectures can be delivered later if you like. What use is it to cry 'Brahman, Brahman,' unless you have discrimination and dispassion? It is just like blowing a conch shell.

"There was once a young man named Padmalochan. His fellow villagers called him by the pet name of Podo. In the village was a dilapidated temple, which contained no image of the deity. All around it, plants of Ashwattha and other bushes had grown up. Inside, bats made their nests. The floor was littered with their droppings and covered with dust. Nobody visited this temple.

"One day after dusk the villagers heard the sound of a conch shell. It came from the side of the temple. The villagers thought that somebody had perhaps installed the image of God in it and that evening worship with lamps was being performed. Boys, old

men, men and women ran to the temple to worship God and witness His arati. But they saw that Padmalochan was standing there blowing a conch. There was no image of God, the dirt of the temple had not been removed, and the bat droppings were still there. They exclaimed, 'Madhava (God) has not been installed in the temple of your heart!' "

Song –

O Podo, Lord Madhava has not been installed in the temple of your heart.

You have brought confusion unnecessarily by blowing the conch.

Eleven bats are camping there night and day.

"What will the blowing of a conch shell avail you, if you want to install Madhava (God) in the temple of your heart and wish to attain Him? Purify your mind first. When your mind is purified, God will take His seat on that pure *asana*. When there are bat droppings, Madhava cannot be installed. There are eleven bats, the eleven organs: Five organs of perception, five of karma [of work like hands, feet, etc.], and the mind. First install Madhava; then if you like, deliver sermons and lectures. Take a plunge first. Dive and pull out the gems. Then take to any other work.

"But nobody wants to dive. One practices no *sadhana*[1] and no *bhajan*[2]; one does not have discrimination and dispassion. However, one learns a couple of things and begins to lecture!

"It is the most difficult task to teach humanity. Only he who receives Bhagavan's commandment after realizing Him may teach mankind."

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[1] Practice of spiritual disciplines
[2] Singing of devotional hymns

The [worldly] wife – all come under the control of one who has sincere bhakti

Thakur comes to the western part of the northern verandah of his room while talking and stands there. Mani is beside him. Thakur says again and again, "You can not reach Bhagavan without developing discrimination and dispassion." Mani is married. He says to himself earnestly, "What will happen to me!" He is twenty-eight years old and has received an English college education. He asks himself, "Do discrimination and dispassion mean renunciation of 'lust and greed?' "

Mani (to Sri Ramakrishna) — What should one do if one's wife says, 'You are neglecting me. I shall commit suicide.'

Sri Ramakrishna (in a grave tone) — She who is an obstacle in the way to the Lord, let her commit suicide or anything she likes! Such a wife should be shunned.

"**She who is a hurdle in the way of the Lord is an *avidya* (worldly) wife.**"

Absorbed in deep thought, Mani leans back against the wall worried. Narendra and the other devotees stand there without speaking a word.

Thakur continues talking for some time. He suddenly comes and stands near Mani. Alone with him, he softly says to Mani, "But if one has sincere love of God, all come under his control – whether it is the king, wicked people, or a wife. If you have sincere bhakti for the Lord, the wife also comes gradually to this path. If you are good, God willing, she can also become good."

These words extinguish the fire in Mani's heart. He had been thinking that if his wife committed suicide, it could not be helped.

Mani (to Sri Ramakrishna) — How dangerous it is to be a householder!

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani and Narendra) — That is why Chaitanya Deva said, 'Listen, brother Nityananda. There is no salvation for a man of the world.'

(Alone to Mani) "There is no salvation for him who doesn't have pure love for the Lord. He who lives a family life after God-realization need have no fear. If one practices spiritual disciplines at times in a solitary place and thus develops pure love for God, there is no danger in family life for him. Chaitanya Deva also had family men as his devotees. But they lived as householders only in name – for they lived without attachment."

The worship of gods with food offerings and waving of lights is over. Now music begins to sound in the Nahabat. It is time for the deities to rest. Sri Ramakrishna sits down to take his meal. Narendra and other devotees are also going to have their meal with him.

Section II

Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Anniversary Celebrated in Dakshineswar

Chapter I

With devotees at daybreak

Today the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna will be celebrated at the Kali Temple. It is Sunday, 11 March, 1883, the second day of Falgun. The intimate disciples of Thakur will celebrate his birthday with him.

This morning devotees have been coming one by one to the temple garden. The shrine of Mother Bhavatarini[1] faces the entrance to the temple garden. The *sanai*[2] is being played beautifully in the natmandir, in *prabhati*[3] raga (type of melody), just after the early morning arati. It is spring and all the creepers and trees have clad themselves in new leaves. The hearts of the devotees dance with joy in anticipation of Thakur's birthday celebration. The very atmosphere seems filled with waves of heavenly joy. When he arrives, M. sees that Bhavanath, Rakhal and Bhavanath's friend, Kalikrishna, are already there. It is very early in the morning. Thakur is talking with them happily, seated on the eastern verandah. M. goes to them and prostrates before Thakur to salute him.

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[1] The Divine Mother, saviour of mankind from the bonds of the world
[2] A wooden wind instrument
[3] Matin; morning song

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Oh, you have come! (To the devotees) One does not succeed if one has the feeling of shame, hatred and fear. How much joy you will have today! But the rascals who do not sing and dance, intoxicated with the name of the Lord, will never attain Him. Why feel ashamed of talking about God, why fear what others think? Come, sing together.

Bhavanath and Kalikrishna sing.

Song –

Blessed is this day so full of joy,

We are together spreading Your true religion in Bharat (India).

Every heart is Your abode, everywhere Your holy name is taken.

The community of devotees is singing Your glories,

Lord, we want neither wealth, nor friends, nor fame. We desire nothing.

Men and women pray to You with a longing heart.

O Lord, we have taken refuge at Your feet. Why fear? Why fear death?

Shouting, 'Victory, victory to You,' we have attained the mine of immortality.

Sri Ramakrishna listens to the song with full attention and his hands folded. While listening, he suddenly goes into ecstasy. In fact, Thakur's mind is like a dry matchstick – strike it but once and it lights. The mind of an ordinary man is like a wet matchstick – howsoever much you may strike it, it doesn't ignite. The reason is that it is attached to the objects of sense enjoyment. Sri Ramakrishna remains absorbed in meditation. After a long time, Kalikrishna whispers something in Bhavanath's ear.

What should be first? Name of the Lord or instruction to the working classes

Kalikrishna salutes Thakur and rises. Thakur is surprised and asks him where he is going.

Bhavanath — Sir, he has some work to do, so he must go.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why does he need to go?

Bhavanath — Sir, he is going to the Baranagore Working Men's Institute.

Kalikrishna leaves.

Sri Ramakrishna — He is unlucky. You see, the name of the Lord today will give such great joy! His fate does not allow him to enjoy it.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees during his birthday celebrations – rules of conduct very difficult for monk

It is between 8:30 and 9:00 in the morning. Not feeling well, Thakur did not take a dip in the Ganges today. Instead, a pitcher of water for his bath is brought to him on the eastern verandah. Thakur takes his bath and the devotees help him. As he bathes, Thakur says, "Keep a jug of water aside." He pours that water on his head last of all. Sri Ramakrishna is taking great care today – he doesn't pour more than a jug full of water over his head.

After his bath, he chants the name of Bhagavan in a very sweet voice. Putting on freshly laundered clothes, he goes south through the brick courtyard to Kali's shrine. A devotee or two

accompany him. He constantly repeats the Name. His eyes, half closed, look like the eye of a bird hatching eggs.

Reaching Mother Kali's shrine, he offers his obeisance and performs worship. It is not the time for formal worship, but he offers flowers and sandal paste at the feet of the Mother, and then brings them to touch his own forehead. Lastly, he brings the Mother's flowers and leaves to his forehead. Then he says to Bhavanath, "Take the green coconut which has been offered to Mother Kali."

Thakur then goes toward his room through the brick courtyard. He is accompanied by M. and Bhavanath, who holds the green coconut. On the right is the Radhakanta (Radha and Krishna) temple. Thakur says, "This is the home of Vishnu." He offers them obeisance by lying prostrate on the ground, after having the darshan[1] of the dual images of Radha and Krishna. To his left are the twelve Shiva temples. He offers obeisance, thinking of Sadashiva[2].

Thakur now reaches his room. He sees that devotees are already assembled there – Rama, Nityagopal, Kedar Mukherji and many others. All of them lie prostrate to salute him. Thakur enquires about their well-being.

Seeing Nityagopal, he says, "Do you want something to eat?" Nityagopal has the attitude of a child. He is not married; he is twenty-three or twenty-four years old. He is generally surcharged with ecstasy. He sometimes visits alone, and at other times in the company of Ram. Sri Ramakrishna loves him because of his ecstatic state. Thakur mentions occasionally that he is in the state of a

[1] Seeing, experiencing; paying respect to a holy place or person by a ceremonial visit; also the blessing or purification felt in the presence of holiness.

[2] An appellation of Lord Shiva

paramahamsa[1]. Just now, he is looking at him as Gopal (child Krishna).

Nityagopal says, "I would like to have something to eat." His whole conduct is childlike.

Instruction to Nityagopal: Complete prohibition of the company of women for the *tyagi* (man of renunciation)

After eating, Thakur takes him to the semi-circular verandah in the western corner of the room near the Ganges. He talks to him.

A great woman devotee, thirty or thirty-two years old, occasionally visits Sri Ramakrishna. She has great devotion to him. She also has great motherly affection for Nityagopal because of his wonderful states of mind. She often takes him to her house.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Nityagopal) — Do you visit her?

Nityagopal (childlike) — Yes, I do go. She takes me home with her.

Sri Ramakrishna — Beware, holy man! Go to her once or twice. Not very often, or you will fall! 'Lust and greed' constitute maya. **A holy man must remain very far away from women.** Everybody has a fall in their company – even Brahma and Vishnu struggle for life in their company.

The devotee listens to all this.

M. (to himself) — How strange! Thakur sometimes says that this devotee is in the state of a *paramahamsa*. Even in this high state there is risk! Thakur has made

[1] Highest class among saints who have attained final knowledge and sanctity

such difficult rules of conduct for a sadhu. He runs the risk of downfall if he associates himself with women. If one does not have such a high ideal, how can one be liberated? That woman is unique in devotion. Even then, there is risk! Now I understand why Sri Chaitanya awarded such hard punishment to the Younger Haridas. Even though Mahaprabhu (Sri Chaitanya) forbade him, the younger Haridas talked with a young widow. Haridas was a sannyasi (monk), of course. So Mahaprabhu left him. What punishment! How hard the rule for a sannyasi! And what love Sri Ramakrishna has for this devotee! Lest some misfortune should befall him later on, he promptly cautions him in advance. The devotees are struck dumb! 'Beware, holy man.' This grave warning is heard by them all.

Chapter III

God with form and God without form – Sri Ramakrishna's samadhi at the name of Rama

Now Sri Ramakrishna has come with the devotees to the northeastern verandah of the room. A householder, a resident of Dakshineswar, is also seated with the devotees. He talks Vedanta at home. In the presence of Thakur he is now talking with Kedar Chatterji on the topic of Shabda Brahman[1].

Sri Ramakrishna and avatarhood – Sri Ramakrishna and harmony of religions

The Resident of Dakshineswar — Is the *Anahata Shabda*[2] always sounding within and without?

[1] The sound of Om
[2] Unstruck sound of Om

Sri Ramakrishna — This sound alone is not enough. There is something indicated by the sound. Can I derive pleasure just from your name? Unless I see you, I cannot be a hundred percent happy.

The Resident of Dakshineswar — That *Shabda* is Brahman, the *Anahata* sound.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Kedar) — Oh, I see. His belief is like that of the rishis. The rishis said to Ramachandra, 'Rama, we know you are the son of Dasharatha. Bharadvaja and other rishis may take you as an avatar and worship you. But we only want Akhanda Sachchidananda (Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute).' Hearing this, Rama laughed and left.

Kedar — The rishis did not accept Rama as an avatar. They were fools.

Sri Ramakrishna (gravely) — Please don't say such things. We all have our own inclinations. Besides, what one understands is what one can digest. The mother cooks fish for her children in different ways. To some she serves *pulao* (fish with fried rice). But every stomach cannot digest *pulao*. To them she gives fish soup – whatever one can digest. And then some people prefer fried fish, and some, fish with sour sauce. (All laugh.) We all have different dispositions.

"The rishis were jnanis (men of knowledge), so they sought Akhanda Sachchidananda (Indivisible Existence Knowledge Bliss Absolute). On the other hand, devotees seek the avatar – to enjoy his love. Seeing Him, the darkness of the mind is dispelled. The *Purana* says, 'When Ramachandra entered the Council Hall, it was as if a hundred suns were shining.' Then why were the councilors not burnt? The answer to this

is that His light is not physical light. The lotus of the heart of all the councilors opened their petals. You see, when the sun rises, the lotus opens its petals."

Sri Ramakrishna is talking to the devotees as he stands there. Suddenly his mind is withdrawn from the external world and plunges within. "The lotus of the heart has opened up," he says. He now goes into deep samadhi.

The lotus of Sri Ramakrishna's heart has opened in samadhi, having the vision of Bhagavan. He stands as before, but like an inanimate object. His holy face is radiant and smiling. Some of the devotees are seated, while others are standing. None utters a word. The devotees watch him intently. They have never before seen this unique image of love, or enjoyed the sight of samadhi. After a long time, his samadhi breaks.

Taking a long breath, Sri Ramakrishna repeats the name of Rama again and again, as though nectar flows from every letter of the word. Now he sits down. The devotees sit around him and gaze at him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — When an avatar comes, an ordinary man cannot recognize him – he comes as if in secret. Three or four of his intimate devotees recognize him. Rama was a full manifestation of Brahman, he was a perfect avatar – but only twelve rishis knew this. The other rishis said, 'Rama, we only consider you as a son of Dasharatha.'

"The Akhanda Sachchidananda[1] cannot be known by all, but he who attains Nitya (the Absolute) and yet lives in His lila (sport) to enjoy himself with Him has ripe bhakti. Only after you have seen the queen in the foreign land (England), can you describe her, her work, and anything else about her. Bharadvaja and other

[1] Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute

rishis prayed to Rama in these words: 'Rama, you are that very Akhanda Sachchidananda. You have manifested Yourself before us in the form of Rama. In fact, it is with the help of Your maya that You have appeared as a human being.' Bharadvaja and other rishis were great devotees of Rama. They had ripe bhakti."

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna in the joy of kirtan and samadhi

The devotees sit wonderstruck listening to this doctrine of the avatar. Some of them say, "What a wonder! He who is called Akhanda Sachchidananda in the *Vedas*, beyond mind and speech, that Being has manifested Himself before us as a man three and a half cubits[1]." Since Sri Ramakrishna himself is saying this, it must be true. Were it not, this great man would not have gone into samadhi just by repeating, "Rama, Rama." Undoubtedly, he has been seeing Rama's form in the lotus of his heart.

Soon the devotees of Konnagar arrive, singing kirtan to the accompaniment of *khol* (Indian drum) and cymbals. Manomohan, Nabai and many others, singing the kirtan of the Name, reach Sri Ramakrishna in the northeastern verandah. Sri Ramakrishna, intoxicated with divine love, sings devotional songs with them.

At times during the kirtan, while dancing, he goes into samadhi. Then he stands like a statue. In this state, the devotees adorn him with big interwoven garlands of flowers. The devotees look on him as Gauranga himself standing before them. Sometimes, Thakur is in the inmost state of samadhi (divine consciousness) when he loses all external

[1] Unit of length based on the length of the forearm from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger and usually equal to about 18 inches

consciousness and appears like an inanimate statue. At other times, overcome with divine love, he dances in a semi-conscious state. When in full consciousness, like Gauranga, he joins the devotees in singing hymns.

Sri Ramakrishna stands in samadhi. He has garlands around his neck. A devotee holds him for fear he might fall. Other devotees stand around him and sing kirtan to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. His sight is fixed, he faces westward; his beautiful moon-like face beams with divine love.

The devotees gaze at this image of joy for a long time. His samadhi ends. It is mealtime. After awhile the kirtan also ends. The devotees busy themselves in serving Sri Ramakrishna his meal.

After resting for some time, Sri Ramakrishna puts on a new yellow cloth and sits down on the smaller cot. The devotees watch him. The unique figure of this joyous saint clad in yellow cloth and wearing a radiant smile on his face attracts them wholeheartedly. Their eyes are never satiated by watching this divinely rare, holy and loving person. M. says to himself, "I continue to want to watch him and to merge myself in that sea of beauty!"

Thakur sits down to take his meal. The devotees, too, happily partake of the prasad.

Chapter V

Talk on harmony of religions with the goswami

After the meal, Sri Ramakrishna rests on the smaller cot. The room, even the outer verandah, is full of people. The devotees sit on the floor in the room, gazing at Thakur all the while. Kedar, Suresh, Ram, Manomohan, Girindra, Rakhal, Bhavanath, M. and a number of other devotees are inside the room. Rakhal's father is also in the room.

Thakur addresses a Vaishnava goswami[1] seated there. Whenever he sees a goswami, Thakur bows his head in salutation. Sometimes he even prostrates himself.

The great importance of name or love of God – Ajamila

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, what do you say is the way?

Goswami — Sir, *Nama* (repetition of the holy Name) indeed takes one to Him. In the age of Kali, Name is of the greatest importance.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, undoubtedly. Name is of great importance. Yet if there is no love, how can it help? Deep yearning for the Lord is essential. What will it avail me if I repeat the Name but my mind remains tied to 'lust and greed'?

"The scorpion or spider sting is not cured just like that. One has to treat it with the smoke of cow dung cakes."

Goswami — But what about Ajamila? Ajamila was a great sinner; there was no sin he did not commit. But he attained liberation by calling his son by his name, Narayana, at the time of his death.

Sri Ramakrishna — Perhaps Ajamila had performed many meritorious deeds in an earlier birth. And it is a fact that he practiced austerities later in his life.

"And one can say this too, that it was his last birth. What use is it to wash an elephant if it again smears its body with mud? It becomes its original self. But before it enters its stable, if someone wipes the dust off and gives it a bath, it remains clean.

[1] A Vaishnava guru or preceptor

"Even if a person is purified by repeating the Name, it is possible that he may be defiled later on by committing a number of sins. Such a person has no will power. He does not promise to himself that he will not commit another sin. A bath in the Ganges makes one's sins disappear. But then, what does it avail one if sins disappear? They say that these sins live on the trees. As soon as a person returns from his bath in the Ganges, all his old sins jump onto his shoulders from the trees. (All laugh.) The same old sins sit again on the shoulders! One takes a step or two after the bath and lo! they are there again on one's shoulders!

"So, repeat the Name and also pray at the same time that you may develop love for the Lord. And that all transitory things, such as money, name and fame, and pleasures of the body, may have less and less attraction for you. You must pray thus."

Vaishnavism and sectarianism – harmony of religions

Sri Ramakrishna (to the goswami) — When one develops sincere devotion to Him, one can realize the Lord by any religion. The Vaishnavas will attain Him, so will the devotees, the Vedantists and also the Brahmajnanis. And the Muslims and the Christians shall also attain Him. Everybody will attain God if they develop sincere devotion to Him. But some people pick a quarrel. They say, 'Unless you repeat the name of Lord Krishna, you will not succeed.' Others say, 'If you don't repeat the name of Mother Kali, you will achieve nothing.' Yet others say, 'Except through Christianity, you will reach nowhere.'

"Such intelligence is known as 'dogmatic intellect'. Thinking that only my religion is true and all others are false is not right. You can attain the Lord by many paths.

"Besides, some say that the Lord has a form, that He is not formless, and they quarrel with the others. The Vaishnavas quarrel with the Vedantists. Unless you see the Lord face to face, you cannot talk of Him correctly. He who has seen Him, knows that the Lord has forms and He is also formless. What else He is cannot be talked about.

"A number of blind men came to an elephant. Somebody told them that it was an elephant. The blind men asked, 'What is the elephant like?' and they began to touch its body. One of them said, 'It is like a pillar.' This blind man had only touched its leg. Another man said, 'The elephant is like a husking basket.' This person had only touched its ears. Similarly, he who touched its trunk or its belly talked of it differently. In the same way, he who has seen the Lord in a particular way limits the Lord to that alone and thinks that He is nothing else.

"A person, having defecated in a jungle, said when he returned, 'I have seen a beautiful red chameleon under a tree.' Another person said, 'I went before you under that tree. Why, it is not red, it is green. I saw it with my own eyes.' And another person said, 'I know it well. I went earlier than both of you. I have also seen that chameleon. It is blue.' Two other people reported that it was yellow or brown, as well as of various colours. This led to a big quarrel. Everybody thought that what he had seen is true. Finding them quarreling, a person said, 'What is the matter, brothers?' When he heard their accounts, he said, 'I live under this very tree. I know very well what this animal is like. Each one of you is right in describing it. It is a chameleon – sometimes green, at other times blue, then again other colours. And at times I find it has no colour at all – it is attributeless.' "

God with form and without form

(To the goswami) "It is no use just saying that the Lord has a form. It is right that He assumes a human body, as in the case of, say, Sri Krishna. He appears before the devotees in different forms. This is true. But it is also true that He is the formless Akhanda Sachchidananda[1]. The *Vedas* say that He is both with form[2] and formless[3], with attributes[4] as well as attributeless[5].

"Do you know how it is? Sachchidananda is like an infinite ocean. When it becomes cold, ocean water freezes into ice, which floats on the surface in different shapes. In the same way, when the cold of bhakti affects the ocean of Sachchidananda, one sees God with form. For the devotee He is with form. But when the sun of jnana rises, the ice melts; it becomes water as before – water above, water below, water everywhere. That is why they pray in the *Srimad Bhagavata*, 'Lord, You are with form, and You are also formless. We see you wandering around like a human being, though the *Vedas* say that You are beyond mind and speech.'

"So one can say that for some devotees He assumes eternal forms. There are places where the ice never melts – it assumes the form of crystal."

Kedar — Sir, in the Srimad Bhagavata Vyasa Deva prayed for God's forgiveness for three misgivings. At one place he says, 'Oh Bhagavan, You are beyond mind and speech. But I am narrating Your lila (worldly play) – that is only Your aspect with form. Pray pardon me.'

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[1] Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute
[2] *Sakara*
[3] *Nirakara*
[4] *Saguna*
[5] *Nirguna*

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, God is with form and He is also formless. Furthermore, He is even beyond form and formlessness. There is no limit to Him.

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna – ever-perfect and dispassion[1] of youth

Rakhal's father is seated in Sri Ramakrishna's room. Rakhal is living with Thakur these days. Rakhal's father has married again after the passing away of his mother. He comes here sometimes to see Rakhal. He has no great objection to Rakhal's staying here. He is a rich worldly man, always busy with litigation and other such matters. A number of lawyers, Deputy Magistrates and the like, often come to visit Thakur. Rakhal's father comes to talk with them at times. He consults them on many worldly matters.

Sri Ramakrishna looks at Rakhal's father every now and then. He wants Rakhal to stay with him at Dakshineswar.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Rakhal's father and the devotees) — Oh, what a mood Rakhal is in these days! Watch him and you will see his lips move every now and then. You see, he mentally repeats the Lord's name, so his lips move.

"All these boys are of the class of the ever-perfect. They are born with the knowledge of the Lord within. They will know when they are a little older that much contact with the world brings a sure fall. In the *Vedas* there is mention of a bird called Homa which lives high in the sky. It never comes down to earth. It lays its egg in the sky and the egg begins to fall. After some days a young chick breaks out of its shell and continues the

[1] Vairagya; nonattachment

fall. It is so high that it grows wings and opens its eyes during the fall. Still falling, it sees that it is going to hit the earth. Falling on the ground means sure death. Seeing the earth fast approaching, the young bird suddenly swoops upward toward its mother. It has but one aim: to reach its mother.

"All these youngsters are like this bird. They are afraid of the world from their early years. They have only one care, 'How to reach the Mother, how to attain the Lord.'

"You might ask, 'How can they have such jnana and bhakti living among worldly people and born out of the semen of worldly parents?' There is a deep meaning to this. If a gram falls on a mound of dung, it still germinates into a gram plant. How useful such a gram is! It has indeed fallen on a heap of dung. But does it mean that it will become a plant of some other type?

"Oh, what a mood Rakhal is developing these days! But how could it be otherwise? If arum is of a good quality, its shoots are also good. (All laugh.) Like father, like son."

M. (aside to Girindra) — He has explained God with form and God without form so well. Do the Vaishnavas believe only in God with form?

Girindra — Perhaps they do. They are one-sided.

M. — Have you been able to understand the 'eternal form' of God? What about the 'crystal'? I am not able to understand it well.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Well brother, what are you talking about?

M. and Girindra smile but do not reply.

Brinde, the maidservant (to Ramlal) — I say, Ramlal, please give this man his meal. You may give me my meal later on.

Sri Ramakrishna — What! You have not given Brinde her meal?

Chapter VII

In joy of devotional songs at Panchavati

The devotees sing the kirtan in the Panchavati in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna joins them. Repeating the name of the Divine Mother with the devotees, he is filled with joy.

Song –

The kite of my mind was soaring high up in the sky of the feet of Mother Shyama.

The rough wind of 'misdeeds' made it fall, circling to the ground.

Maya's pull made it heavy and I could not raise it again.

It got entangled with the string of love for wife and children.

Alas! Its crest of jnana is rent. One may pull at it but it falls down.

It has lost its crest, so how can it fly? The six passions have overpowered it.

It was tied to the string of bhakti. While playing, it fell into illusion.

Oh Nareschandra! Rather than weep or laugh, it was better not to have come to play.

They sing another song with the accompaniment of drum and cymbals. Thakur dances with the devotees.

Song –

The bee of my mind drinks deep at the blue lotus-like feet of Mother Shyama.

At the blue lotus-like feet of Shyama, at the blue lotus-like feet of Mother Kali.

The honey of all worldly things – the flowers of lust and so on – have lost all charm.

The feet of the Mother are black-hued, so is the bee; black has mixed with black.

The five elements, turbulent and fascinating, have broken away on seeing this play.

It is only now that Kamalakanta has seen the fulfillment of his hopes.

Joys or sorrows are the same to him; the ocean of joy rolls on.

The kirtan continues. The devotees sing.

Song –

What a machine Ma Shyama has built!

(What a machine Ma Kali has made!)

In this machine three and a half cubits high, what pranks She is playing!

Mother, You Yourself are working this machine, holding its cord.

But the machine says: I am working by myself. It does not know who is working it.

Whoever finds the Mother remains a machine no more.

Yet some machines have even bound the Mother Herself with the cord of love.

Song –

One comes to this world to throw dice. Coming here, I had entertained so many hopes.

To hope for hope is a low state of mind. First I got a 'five' [of the dice].

Then a 'twelve'! And 'eighteen' and 'sixteen'. The way they come again and again, I, too, came to the world.

O Mother! When I got the 'next twelve,' I got entangled with the five[1] and the six[2].

The devotees enjoy themselves. When they stop for awhile, Thakur rises. A number of devotees have arrived in and around Thakur's room.

Sri Ramakrishna is going south toward his room from the Panchavati. M. is with him. They meet Trailokya as they reach Bakultala. Trailokya offers his obeisance to him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya) — They are singing in the Panchavati. Why don't you go there?

Trailokya — What shall I do there?

Sri Ramakrishna — Why, it is very nice. Do see it once.

Trailokya — I have already been there once.

Sri Ramakrishna — Good, very good. Very nice.

Chapter VIII

Sri Ramakrishna and right conduct in household

[1] Five elements collectively, namely: earth, water, fire, air and space
[2] Six passions

It is about half past five or six. Sri Ramakrishna is seated with the devotees on the southeastern verandah. He is looking at the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Kedar and other devotees) — The sadhu who has renounced the world only repeats the name of Hari. He has no other work to do. If he meditates on the Lord, there is nothing to wonder at. If he doesn't contemplate the Lord and doesn't repeat the name of Hari, everybody will speak ill of him.

"But if a family man repeats the name of Hari, it is heroic. Just see: King Janaka was a great hero. He wielded a double-edged sword – one of jnana and the other of karma. On the one hand he was a perfect knower of Brahman; on the other, he engaged himself in worldly work. An unchaste wife attends to her household work with great care. But she is constantly thinking of her lover.

"The company of holy men is always essential. Holy men bring you in contact with the Lord."

Kedar — That is true, sir! Saints come for the good of mankind. They are like the railway engine which has many compartments attached to it. It pulls them all. Or they are like a river or reservoir: they quench the thirst of many people.

The devotees gradually prepare to go home. One by one they prostrate themselves before Sri Ramakrishna and take the dust of his feet. Addressing Bhavanath, Sri Ramakrishna says, "Don't go home today. I am greatly inspired when I see you people."

Bhavanath has not yet entered family life. He is about nineteen or twenty, fair complexioned, and has a beautiful body. He begins to shed tears at the

very mention of the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna looks on him as Narayana (the very manifestation of God).

Section III

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple with Devotees – Second Visit of Adhar

Chapter I

Manilal and visit to Kashi

Come! Let's go once again to the Dakshineswar temple to see Sri Ramakrishna. Let us observe how he enjoys himself in the company of devotees, how he is ever absorbed in samadhi thinking of the Lord. Let us see him now in samadhi, now intoxicated with the joy of devotional songs, and now talking to the devotees. He always has the name of the Lord on his holy lips. His mind is ever indrawn, his conduct is like a five-year-old child. He utters the name of the Divine Mother with every breath. His conduct is absolutely like that of an ego-less five-year-old child. A child of five is unattached to sense objects; he is always happy, guileless and magnanimous. Sri Ramakrishna's one word is that God is the reality and all else is unreal, a matter of two days. Let us go and see that child intoxicated with divine love. The great yogi that he is! He roams all alone on the shore of the infinite ocean. One can't tell what he sees in this infinite ocean of Sachchidananda. Lo! Having witnessed it, he is roaming about mad with love.

It is Sunday, the first day of the bright fortnight of the month of Chaitra. Yesterday, Saturday, was the new moon when Sri Ramakrishna went to Balaram's house. In the deep dark night of the new moon, Mahakali plays alone with Mahakala[1].

[1] Shiva, the Absolute

For this reason Thakur does not remain still long on the new moon. And it is why he is in the state of a child who is with his mother night and day and who cannot live without her.

It is Sunday morning, 8 April, 1883, twenty-sixth day of Chaitra. Thakur is seated like a child. Rakhal, a young devotee, is seated close by.

M. comes and prostrates himself before Thakur. Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, Ramlal, Kishori and many other devotees are gathered here. The elderly Brahmo devotee, Manilal Mallick, enters and offers his salutations to Sri Ramakrishna.

Mani Mallick has been on pilgrimage to Kashi. He is a trader and has an office in Kashi.

Sri Ramakrishna — So you have been to Kashi. Did you meet any sadhus there?

Manilal — Yes sir, I went to see Trailanga Swami, Bhaskarananda, and some others.

Sri Ramakrishna — Please tell me how you found them.

Manilal — Trailanga Swami is still in the same temple on Manikarnika Ghat with Benimadhav. People say that he was in a high spiritual state before. He could work any number of miracles. Now they are far fewer.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is fault finding by worldly people.

Manilal — Bhaskarananda meets everybody. He is not like Trailanga Swami who doesn't say a word.

The spiritually perfect believe that 'God is the doer' – others believe in vice and virtue, in 'free will'

Sri Ramakrishna — Did you have any conversation with Bhaskarananda?

Manilal — Yes sir, we talked for a long time. Among other things we discussed vice and virtue. He said: Don't tread the path of sin. Don't even think of evil. This is what the Lord requires of you. Perform only actions which bring you merit.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, that is true as far as worldly people are concerned. But it is different for those who are illumined, who have realized that the Lord is the only reality and all else is unreal and ephemeral. They know that the Lord alone does everything and that we are all non-doers. They who are illumined never take a wrong step, they don't have to calculate before eschewing sin. They have so much love for the Lord that all their actions are exemplary. But they know that they are not the doers of their actions, they know that they are only the servants of the Lord – that they are only the machines while the Lord is the operator of the machine. They know that what they are doing is by His will, that what they speak is what He makes them speak, that they move the way He makes them move.

"They who are illumined have gone beyond vice and virtue. They see that the Lord is indeed doing everything. There was a monastery whose sadhus used to go out every day to beg holy food. One day one of the sadhus saw that a landlord was badly thrashing a man. The sadhu was very compassionate. He intervened to stop the landlord from beating the man. The landlord was in a rage. All his anger fell on the body of the sadhu – he thrashed him so badly that the sadhu fell unconscious. Somebody went to the monastery to say

that one of their sadhus had been harshly beaten by the landlord. The sadhus of the monastery came and saw him lying unconscious. All five of them lifted him, carried him to the monastery and laid him down. They sat around the unconscious sadhu downcast. Some of them fanned him. One of them said, 'Pour a little milk in his mouth.' As they did so, the sadhu regained consciousness and opened his eyes. A brother of the monastery said, 'Let me see whether he has regained consciousness, whether he can recognize us.' He spoke loudly to the sadhu, asking him, 'Maharaj! Who is making you drink the milk?' The sadhu said slowly, 'Brother, he who beat me is indeed giving me milk to drink.'

"Till one has realized the Lord, one cannot attain such a state."

Manilal — Sir, what you are saying is a lofty idea. I had such conversations with Bhaskarananda – on various topics.

Sri Ramakrishna — In whose house is he staying?

Manilal — In some householder's residence.

Sri Ramakrishna — How old is he?

Manilal — He should be 55.

Sri Ramakrishna — And did you talk of anything else?

Manilal — I asked him how one could cultivate devotion and love for God[1]. He said, 'Repeat the Name. Say Rama, Rama.'

[1] Bhakti

Sri Ramakrishna — That is very good.

Chapter II

Family life and renunciation of work

The worship of the Mother of the Universe, Radhakanta, and the twelve Shivas in the temples has ended. The sounds of music and bell-ringing related to the arati and food offering is heard. It is the month of Chaitra. It is midday. The sun is shinning brightly. Only a short while ago, flood tide started and the wind began to blow from the south. The holy Bhagirathi (the Ganges) began to flow northward a short time ago. Thakur is resting in his room after eating.

Rakhal's native village is near Basirhat. In summer there is a great scarcity of water in his region.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani Mallick) — Look, Rakhal was telling me that there is a great scarcity of water in his region. Why don't you get a reservoir dug there? It will benefit so many. (Smiling) You have so much money. What will you do with it? It is said that dealers of oil are very calculating. (Thakur and the devotees laugh.)

Manilal Mallick's home is in the Sinduriapatti region of Calcutta. The Sinduriapatti Brahmo Samaj holds its sessions there. He invites numerous people during the annual festival of the Brahmo Samaj. He invites Sri Ramakrishna with them. Manilal also has a garden house in Baranagore. He often stays there alone and occasionally goes to see Thakur. Manilal is certainly a man of calculation! He seldom hires a carriage to go to Baranagore directly. Instead, he first goes to Sobhabazar by tram. From there, he hires a seat in the carriage for Baranagore. And yet he has no shortage of money. Many years later, after this, he

donated twenty-five thousand rupees to support poor students.

Manilal keeps quiet, but after some time, having talked about various other matters, he refers to the prior conversation: "Sir, you were talking about a reservoir. That is all right. But why talk about dealers of oil?"

Some of the devotees try to suppress their laughter. Thakur also smiles.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and Brahmo devotees in Dakshineswar – the essence of *prema* (ecstatic love)

In a little while a number of elderly Brahmo devotees arrive from Calcutta. One of them is Thakurdas Sen. There is a big gathering of devotees in the room. Thakur is seated on the smaller cot. Facing north, with a smile on his face, he sits like a child, conversing happily with the Brahmo devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Brahmo devotees and others) — You people talk so much of *prema*. But is it such an ordinary thing? Chaitanya Deva was in the state of ecstatic love. There are two characteristics of ecstatic love. One is to forget the world, to become unaware of everything external in the love of God. Chaitanya Deva would think that it was Vrindavan when he was in any forest and it was the Jamuna river at the sight of the sea.

"The second characteristic is to have no attachment to the body one holds so dear. The conviction of the body as the self fully disappears.

"You cannot have *prema* till you have seen the Lord.

"There are some marks of God-realization. When the splendour of love manifests within, God-realization is not far away.

"What does the splendour of love mean? Discrimination, dispassion, compassion, service to the holy, company of the holy, chanting the name and glories of the Lord, truthfulness – all these.

"When one comes across these signs of love, one can know that the vision of God is not far away. By looking at the condition of the servant's house, one can easily determine if a rich man has decided to visit it. First of all, all weeds are cleared, cobwebs are removed, and the floor of the house is cleaned. The rich man himself sends a cotton carpet, a hubble-bubble and other such things. Seeing all these things being carried to the house, everyone surmises that the visit of a gentleman is not far away."

A Devotee — Sir, does one have to reason before being able to control the senses?

Sri Ramakrishna — That is a path – the path of discrimination. If you take to the path of devotion[1], the inner senses get controlled automatically. And it is easier. The more you develop love for the Lord, the less you care for the pleasures of the senses.

"When they lose their child, can the grief-stricken parents think of their bodily pleasures?

A Devotee — I cannot imagine loving God.

Great importance of God's name – the way – the Divine Mother's name

[1] Bhakti

Sri Ramakrishna — By repeating His name you rid yourself of all your sins. Lust, anger, desire for creature comforts and the rest all disappear.

A Devotee — But who likes to repeat His name?

Sri Ramakrishna — Pray to God with a longing heart that you may develop a taste for His name. He always fulfills one's wishes ...

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing in a sweet voice. Overwhelmed by the sorrows of man, he expresses to the Divine Mother the pangs he feels in his heart. Bringing upon himself the state of an ordinary human being, he talks to the Divine Mother of suffering of humanity.

Song –

O Mother Shyama, it is not anybody's fault. I myself am drowning in the well I have dug.

The six passions – lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride and envy – are the spade by which I have dug a well in sacred land.

This well is now full of the waters of Kala (Death).

O the heartthrob of Death! O the Beloved of Death!

O my Redeemer! How can I save myself?

O the embodiment of the three gunas, You can rid me of these modes through Your powers.

How can I save myself from these waters of Death? Thinking of it, I shed an unceasing flow of tears.

Before, the level of the water of Death was not so high, but now it rises to my chest. How can I save myself?

O my Mother! You are my only refuge. Mother, liberate me. You can take me across by a single glance of Yours.

And then he sings of the delirious fever of mankind, which can be cured only by one's love for Her name.

Song –

O Mother Shankari[1], O great physician, what delirious fever I suffer, in spite of the grace of Thy feet.

This perishable transitory pride of mine is consuming me in its flames. What depraved attachment I have developed for 'me and mine'!

How can I sustain my life – my desire for wealth and friends is ceaseless?

O the bestower of all goodness! I continue to indulge in things illusory, in wrong doings, in committing sinful acts and so on.

Says Dasharathi: My eyes are full of the deep sleep of maya,

And my stomach filled with the worm of violence. I am revolving as in a whirlpool of illusory action.

I am developing night and day distaste for Your name. Alas! will I be cured of this malady?

Sri Ramakrishna — 'Developing distaste for Your name.' If in disease you develop distaste, you have no possibility of being saved. If you retain a bit of taste, there is good hope for cure. Therefore, they talk of taste for the Name. The Lord's name must be repeated. Call the Lord by any name: Durga, Krishna, Shiva or any other. If, while repeating the Name, your love increases day by day, if you feel joy, then there is no danger. You are sure to be cured. His grace is sure to fall on you.

Sincere bhakti versus artificial bhakti – God cares only for the mind

[1] An appellation of Goddess Durga

"As the state of your mind, so is your gain. Two friends walking together saw the Bhagavata being recited at a place on the way. One of them said, 'Come, friend, let's go and listen to the recitation of the Bhagavata.' His friend looked in, but shortly left for the red light area. He soon felt disgusted with himself and thought, 'Shame on me! While my friend is listening to the story of Lord Hari, look where I have brought myself!' On the other hand, the fellow who was listening to the Bhagavata was also feeling regret. He said to himself, 'What a fool I am! This fellow is talking nonsense and I sit here listening to it! How my friend must be enjoying himself!' Now, when both these men died, he who was listening to the Bhagavata was taken away by a messenger of death and he who had gone to a prostitute was taken to Vaikuntha (Vishnu's abode, heaven) by a messenger of Vishnu.

"Bhagavan sees the mind. He doesn't care who is doing what or where one is. 'Janardhana[1] knows the innermost thought.'

"While initiating a disciple in the Kartabhaja sect, they tell him, 'Now it is your mind.' That is to say, now it all depends on your mind.

"They say that he who has the right kind of mind acts correctly and achieves the right end.

"Because of the powers of his mind, Hanuman could cross the ocean. 'I am a servant of Rama, I repeat His name, what is impossible for me?' He had this faith."

Why can't one see the Lord? Because of one's egoism

[1] An appellation of Lord Vishnu, the vanquisher of demon Jana

"As long as one retains one's I-ness, one is ignorant. As long as egoism persists, there is no liberation.

"Cows bellow, '*Hamba*, *hamba*' and goats bleat, '*Mein*, *mein*.' For this reason, they have to suffer a lot. The butcher slaughters them and makes shoes, drums and hides out of their skin. There is no end to their suffering. In the Hindi language, *hum* and *mein* both mean 'I'. The uttering of *mein, mein* (I, I) leads to more and more suffering. At last, the butcher makes strings with the guts of these animals. When the carder uses the string in his bow, it produces the sound of *tuhun, tuhun*. That is to say, 'You, you.' It is only when one says, 'You, You,' that one is saved and there is no more suffering.

"Oh Lord, you are the Doer and I, a non-doer. This is what constitutes jnana (spiritual wisdom).

"It is only when you become lowly that you can rise. The chatak bird has its nest near the ground, but it can soar at high altitudes. Farming is not possible at high elevations. You need low land to farm. Water only collects on low land; only there is cultivation possible."

Company of sadhus essential for the householders – who is truly poor?

"One should take a little trouble to seek the company of the holy. At home one only talks of worldly matters. There is always one ailment or the other. The parrot says, 'Rama, Rama,' only when it settles on a perch. While flying through the jungle, it only squawks.

"Money does not make a man great. A sign of a wealthy man is light in every room. The poor do not have money to spend on oil, so they can't have that many lights. You see, one must not keep this temple of

the body in darkness: one must light the lamp of jnana (knowledge) within.

"Light the lamp of jnana in the house and see the face of the Mother Brahmamayi[1]."

Real meaning of prayer – marks of spiritual awakening

"Everyone can attain jnana. There is the individual self and the Supreme Being. One must pray to God. Everyone can be united with the Supreme Self. Every house is fitted with gas pipes, but one must apply to the gas company to receive the gas. When you file an application, the company will arrange for the gas and your house will be lit. The company has its office in Sealdah. (All laugh.)

"Some people may become illumined. They have a special mark: they don't like to hear anything but words about the Lord. They don't like to talk of anything but of the Lord. Take, for example, the seven seas, the rivers of the Ganges and the Jamuna – they are all full of water. But the chatak bird wants only the raindrop. It is dying of thirst, but it does not drink any other water."

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna and others sing – Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi

[1] All Blissful Mother of the Universe

Sri Ramakrishna asks somebody to sing. Ramlal and a brahmin brahmachari[1] of the Kali Temple sing in accompaniment with a *banya*[2].

Song –

O Kamalapati[3], the lover of bhakti, if you dwell in the Vrindavan of my heart, my devotion to you will be like that of chaste Radha.

My wish for liberation will be like the milkmaids, and my body will be like the village of Nanda; my love will be like that of mother Yashoda.

Hold me, hold me, O Janardhana[4]. Lift the mount Govardhan of the weight of my sins[5]. Kill quickly the six messengers of Kamsa, lust and so on.

Play on your flute of grace and tame the cows of my mind. I pray that You remain in this pasture of my heart and that I may have the glimpse of my ideal.

Dwell now and evermore with your heart full of affection for your servant under the Vanshivatta[6] of hope.

If you say that you are a prisoner of the love of the cowherds of Braja, then this Dasharathi, bereft of all spiritual knowledge, will become a cowherd and your slave.

Song –

What value has the new cloud in comparison to the moon-like face of beloved Shyam (Krishna)?

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[1] An unmarried and celibate student practicing spiritual discipline
[2] A semi-circular instrument played along with the tabla (drum)
[3] The husband of Kamala (Goddess Lakshmi).
[4] An appellation of Lord Vishnu; the vanquisher of demon Jana.
[5] Krishna had lifted the mount Govardhan on his finger. So lifting the weight of sins means to mitigate the effects of sins.
[6] A banyan tree at Vrindavan under which Krishna played his flute.

With a flute in His hands and a smile on His lips, He lights the world with His loveliness.

Clad in yellow robes, He outshines lightning. A wreath of wild flowers swings from His lotus-like breast to His feet.

In the company of youthful maidens, He lights up the bank of the Jamuna. Outshining numberless moons is this moon of the lineage of Nanda.

O friend! With the music of his flute, He, the epitome of all excellence, has stolen my heart, my mind and my wisdom.

Says Ganga Narayana, 'To whom shall I tell my sorrow? O friend, if you were to fetch water from the bank of the Jamuna, you would know it.'

Song –

The kite of my mind was soaring high up in the sky of the feet of Mother Shyama.

The rough wind of 'misdeeds' made it fall, circling to the ground.[1]

Way to God-realization – love, gopi-like love – 'tiger of love'

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Just as the tiger devours other animals, similarly, the 'tiger of love' swallows lust, anger and such other enemies. Once you develop love of the Lord, lust, anger and the rest disappear. The gopis (milkmaids) had developed such love for Krishna.

"Moreover, there is the 'collyrium of love'. Radha says, 'Friend, I see Krishna filling all the four directions.' Her friend says, 'Dear one, you have applied the 'collyrium of love' to your eyes. That is why you see

[1] This song was sung earlier too. See Section II, Chapter VII of this volume.

it so.' It is said that if you use a collyrium made with the burnt head of a frog, you see snakes everywhere.

"They who live only with 'lust and greed' – who don't think of God even once – are bound souls. What great work can they perform? They are like mangoes pecked by crows. Such mangoes cannot be offered to the gods. Eating them yourself is also risky.

"Bound souls, worldly people, are like silkworms. They could come out of their cocoons if they wished, but they have built their own homes and maya does not allow them to escape. And it all ends with death.

"Liberated souls are not under the control of 'lust and greed'. Some clever silkworms cut their cocoons and come out. But they are very few.

"Because of maya (attachment), one remains forgetful. Few attain spiritual awakening, few are not deluded by the magic of maya, are not subject to the control of 'lust and greed.' When the pot[1] containing ashes from the maternity room falls on one's feet, the 'damn, damn' word of the magician can do no harm. One can see exactly what the magician is doing.

"There are two classes of perfect souls: one is *sadhanasiddha* (perfected by spiritual disciplines) and the other *kripasiddha* (perfected by the grace of God). Some people go to great trouble to bring water to their fields for a good harvest. Others don't have to struggle at all; rainwater fills their fields. One has to practice sadhana rigorously to save oneself from maya. He who is a *kripasiddha* doesn't have to struggle. But there are only one or two such people.

"And then there are the *nityasiddhas* (ever-perfect ones). They are already spiritually awakened in every

[1] In India, normally a pot containing ashes of cow dung and other substances are kept in maternity room to ward off evil spirits

life. Take the example of a plugged fountain. The plumber, while doing something else, accidentally removes the obstruction and lo! water gushes forth from the fountain. When they see the love for God in an ever-perfect person express itself for the first time, people are amazed. They wonder where such bhakti, such nonattachment[1] and such intense love came from."

Thakur is talking of the love for God – the love of the gopis for Krishna. In the meanwhile, some music begins to play. Ramlal sings.

Song –

O Lord, Thou art my all, the support of my life, the Essence of essences.

I have none but Thee as my own in the three worlds.

Thou art my joy, peace, support, refuge, treasure, wealth, knowledge, intelligence and strength.

Thou art my home, my rest, my relaxation, friend and family.

Thou art my present, my salvation, my future and my heaven.

Thou art my scripture and injunctions too, Thou my wish-yielding guru, the fountainhead of my never-ending bliss.

Thou art the means, the end. Thou art the creator, the sustainer and the adorable one.

Thou art the chastising father, the tender-hearted mother, the pilot who steers me across the sea of life.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Oh, what a beautiful song! 'Thou art my all in all.' The milkmaids said to Radha when Akrur came [to fetch Sri Krishna],

[1] Vairagya

'Oh Radha, He has come to steal your entire wealth!' Such love! Such longing they had for Bhagavan!

And then another song –

Does the chariot of Him who wields the *sudershan chakra*[1] and who moves the world around and around with His wheel of Power need any wheels? O milkmaids! Don't hold the wheels of the chariot back.

(These lines refer to an incident when the milkmaids held back the wheels of Sri Krishna's chariot from moving when he was to go to Mathura with Akrur from Vrindavan).

Song –

O dear *sakhi*[2], for whom are you now making this garland with so much care and love?

While listening to the song, Sri Ramakrishna dives deep in the sea of samadhi. The devotees gaze upon him amazed. It is quiet. No movement is made. Thakur is merged in samadhi. He sits there with folded hands, as he is seen in the photograph. Tears of joy trickle down the outer corners of his eyes.

Conversation with the Lord – Sri Ramakrishna's vision – Krishna pervading everywhere

Thakur returns to the normal state of consciousness after quite some time. But what was he talking about with Him whom he has seen in samadhi? Some words reach the ears of the devotees. Thakur speaks indistinctly to himself, "You are I, I am You. You eat, I eat You... Beautiful indeed: You do it all."

"Are my eyes jaundiced? I see You everywhere.

[1] A wheel shaped weapon of Lord Vishnu
[2] Milkmaid friend of Radha

"O Krishna! Friend of the lowly and beloved of my soul. Govinda!"

Saying, "Beloved of my soul," and "Govinda," he again enters samadhi. Absolutely still and unable to take their eyes off him, the devotees see Sri Ramakrishna in a deep ecstatic state.

Chapter V

Sri Ramakrishna filled with God-consciousness – word of God issuing from his lips

Second visit of Adhar Sen – Sri Ramakrishna instructs a householder

Sri Ramakrishna is in samadhi and is seated on the smaller cot. The devotees sit around him. Adhar Sen has arrived, accompanied by several friends. He is a Deputy Magistrate. It is his second visit to Thakur. Adhar is twenty-nine or thirty years old. Saradacharan, a friend of Adhar, is grieving the loss of his son. Saradacharan was a Deputy Inspector of Schools. He is now retired and receives a pension. He had been practicing meditation and prayer even before his retirement. Nothing consoles him after the death of his elder son. That is why Adhar, having mentioned Thakur's name to him, has brought him here. Adhar had also been wanting to see Thakur again.

Sri Ramakrishna's samadhi ends. He sees the roomful of devotees looking at him and then mumbles something to himself.

Is the Lord talking and instructing from his lips?

Sri Ramakrishna — It is seldom that worldly people show spiritual wisdom – only occasionally, like the flame of a lamp. No, no, it is like the ray of the sun

when it peeps through a chink in the wall. It is only possible for worldly people to repeat the Lord's name – not to feel His love. It is like a child saying, 'I swear by God.' He has learnt these words from his quarreling aunts.

"Worldly people have no grit. It does not matter to them whether they succeed or not. If they dig a well for water but strike a rock, they stop digging and look for another spot. If they find sand in the next spot, they give that spot up too. If they had continued to dig at the original spot, they would have found water there.

"A human being reaps what he sows; as the song goes."

Song –

Nobody is to be blamed, Mother. I am drowning in the water of the well I have dug.

" 'I' and 'mine' constitute ignorance. If you think about it deeply, you will find that what you call 'I' is none other than the Atman. Think about it. Are you the body? Are you bones, or flesh, or something else? You will conclude that you are none of these. You don't have a distinguishing individuality. Moreover, you do nothing. You have neither good qualities nor defects, neither merit nor sin.'

"To say that this is gold and that is brass is ignorance. That all is gold is jnana."

Signs of God-realization – is Sri Ramakrishna an Incarnation of God?

"All reasoning stops after God-realization. Yet, some people do reason even after they have realized God. And some people chant God's name and glories out of love for Him.

"How long does a child cry? Till he is put to the mother's breast. Thereafter, he stops crying and he is full of joy. He takes his mother's milk so joyfully! Yet, he may also play and smile while he sucks.

"God has become all the forms there are. Even so, He manifests most in the human being. He is especially present in the person who has the nature of a purely *sattvic*[1] child – who laughs, cries, dances and sings innocently."

Loss of a son – 'O *jiva*, get ready for the battle'

Thakur inquires about Adhar's well being. Adhar tells him that his friend has lost his son. Thakur begins to sing a song.

O jiva! Get ready for the battle!

Death has entered your house in battle array.

Mounting the chariot of bhakti, bearing the quiver of jnana,

Bending the bow of your tongue with the bowstring of love,

Aim the Brahmastra[2] that is the name of the Mother of Universe.

Here is a strategy for the battle: you need no chariot or charioteer.

Fight your foe from the bank of the Ganges; he will easily be slain.

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[1] Possessing the quality of sattva

[2] Weapon of Brahma (Lord the Creator)

"What to do? Be ready for death. Death has entered your house. You have to battle it with the weapon of God's name. He is the Doer. I say, 'Mother, I act as You make me act; I speak what You make me speak. I am an instrument, You are the Being who uses the instrument. I am the dwelling, You are the indweller; I am the carriage, You the driver.'

"Give Him the general power of attorney. If you give the responsibility to a good man, you never suffer any harm. Let His will be done.

"I say, brother, shouldn't you be sorrow-stricken? He was your son! When Ravana was killed in battle, Lakshmana ran to him and saw that there was no spot among his bones where there was not a hole. Then he said to Rama, 'Rama, how powerful are your arrows! There is no spot on Ravana's body without a hole.' Rama replied, 'Brother, the holes that you see in his bones are not made by arrows. It is due to grief for his sons. That grief has pierced all his bones. All the holes are marks of it – his grief has done this to him.'

"You see, all this is transitory – home, family and children are all for two days. Only the palm tree is real. One or two fruits have dropped from the tree. Why sorrow for them?

"God does three things: He creates, He preserves, and He dissolves. Death is inevitable. At the time of universal dissolution, everything will be destroyed, nothing will survive. But the Divine Mother will preserve some seeds of creation. She will take them out again at the time of the new creation. It is just like the mistress of the house with her hotchpotch pot. (All laugh.) In it She preserves cucumber seeds, sea-foam and indigo pills in small bags."

Chapter VI

Instruction to Adhar – death stands facing you

Thakur talks to Adhar while standing on the verandah to the north of his room.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Adhar) — You are a Deputy [Magistrate]. You have this position by the Lord's grace. Don't forget Him. But know that everybody has to tread the same path. You are here only for a few days[1].

"The world is your place of work. You have come here to work. It is just as one comes from one's country home and works in Calcutta.

"Some work is necessary – you must practice some spiritual disciplines. You must finish your work quickly. The goldsmith, while melting gold, uses bellows, blow pipes and a fan to blow air so that fire may give more heat and the gold may melt. When the gold melts, he asks for a smoke. He has worked hard for a long time; he will now smoke his pipe. You have to have grit, a firm resolve. Only then can you practice spiritual disciplines.

"The mystic seed of His name is very powerful. It dispels ignorance. A seed is so soft, and so is its sprout. Yet it breaks the earth and germinates.

"When you live amid 'lust and gold,' your mind is forcefully pulled to them. So you must be cautious. But he who has renounced the world need not fear much. The genuine renouncer keeps a proper distance from

[1] Adhar Sen passed away after a year and a half. Getting the news, Thakur cried for a long time before the Divine Mother. Adhar was a great devotee. Thakur had said to him, "You are my own." Adhar's house was in Benetola, Sobhabazar, Calcutta. Several of his daughters are still alive. His brothers, Shyam Lal and Hira Lal, and other members of his family still live there in his Calcutta house. The drawing room of the house and the worship hall have become places of pilgrimage.

'lust and gold'. That is how he can fix his mind on the Lord while practicing spiritual disciplines.

"Who is a real renouncer? He who can keep his mind fixed on the Lord. Like the bee which only takes honey from flowers. But he who is in the household, living amid 'lust and gold,' can sometimes fix his mind on the Lord, and at other times it goes to 'lust and gold'. He is like the ordinary housefly who sits on sweets one moment and on a sore or excreta another.

"You must always fix the mind on the Lord. Initially, you have to make some effort. Later you enjoy a pension."

Section IV

Sri Ramakrishna in Worship Hall of Surendra's House

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna celebrates worship of Mother Annapurna with the devotees at Surendra's house

It is 6.00 p.m. Sri Ramakrishna has graced the assembly of the devotees with his presence in the courtyard of Surendra's house.

One climbs east from the courtyard to reach the worship hall. There a beautiful image of the Mother has been installed. Around Her neck is a garland of flowers, and hibiscus and vilwa leaves have been offered at Her feet. The Mother's image illumines the worship hall.

Today the worship of Mother Annapurna[1] is to be celebrated. It is Sunday, 15 April, 1883, the eighth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Chaitra (the third of Vaishakh 1290 B.Y.) Surendra has invoked the Mother, so he has invited Sri Ramakrishna. Accompanied by devotees, he arrives at the worship hall and pays his respect to the deity. He stands there, gazing at the Mother, telling the *mula mantra*[2] on his fingers. The devotees also pay their obeisance and have darshan of the deity. They stand close to the Lord (Sri Ramakrishna).

Thakur now comes down to the courtyard with the devotees. It is covered with cotton carpets, over which are laid white linen sheets and bolsters. On

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[1] Divine Mother, the giver of food

[2] An esoteric word or words uttered inwardly at prayer

one side a number of Vaishnava devotees are seated with their drums and cymbals, prepared to sing devotional songs. The devotees sit around Thakur.

Thakur is invited to lean against a bolster, but he does not do so. Instead, he pushes the bolster a little away before sitting down.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — To lean against a bolster! Do you know how difficult it is to give up vanity? You may think you are not prey to vanity, but it enters in no time from somewhere.

"Even when the goat's head is severed, its limbs continue to shake. Suppose you have a fearful dream. After you wake up, even quite wide-awake, you still have palpitations of the heart. Vanity is just like this. Even if you forcibly push it away, it returns. Guests often put on long faces and complain, 'Oh, we have not been treated hospitably.' "

Kedar — 'Be humbler than a blade of grass, be patient and forbearing like a tree.'

Sri Ramakrishna — I am the dust of the dust of the feet of the devotees.

Vaidyanath arrives. He is well educated and an advocate in the High Court of Calcutta. He salutes Thakur, folding his hands, and takes a seat on one side.

Surendra (to Sri Ramakrishna) — He is related to me.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, I see. He has a very agreeable nature.

Surendra — He has come to ask you something.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vaidyanath) — Whatever you see is all His power. Without His power, nobody can do anything. Yet God's power is not equally manifest everywhere. Vidyasagar asked me, 'Has God given more power to some?' I replied, 'If there was not unequal power, why should we have come to see you? Have you grown two horns?' Yet this is certain: God is present in all as the all-pervading power[1] – but there is a special manifestation of His power in some.

Free will or God's will

Vaidyanath — Sir, I have a doubt about what they call free will. Sometimes I wonder if it is true that I can do a good act as well as a bad one. Do we really have free will?

Sri Ramakrishna — Everything is under the Lord's control – it is all His *lila* (divine sport). He has created a variety of things: small, big, powerful, weak, good and bad. Whether a man is good or bad is all His maya, His sport. Don't you see that all the trees in the garden are not alike?

"Till one has realized God, one entertains the feeling that one is free to act. This illusion is also created by Him. If man did not feel that he had free will, there would be much more sin. If sin entailed no punishment, one would have no fear of it.

"Do you know how one feels when one has realized the Lord? It is like this: I am a machine, You are the operator; I am the home, You are the mistress of the home. I am a chariot and You are the charioteer. I move the way You make me move. I speak the way You make me speak."

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[1] Vibhu

Is it possible to realize the Lord in a day? Company of the holy is essential

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vaidyanath) — It is not right to argue. What do you think?

Vaidyanath — Yes sir, the inclination to argue disappears only when one attains jnana.

Sri Ramakrishna — Thank you! (Since Thakur says it in English, they all laugh.) You will succeed. When a person talks of the Lord, people don't believe him. If some spiritually advanced person says that he has seen the Lord, even then ordinary people don't believe him. They say, 'If he has seen the Lord, he should show us too.' But can one learn the science of examining the pulse in one day? One must accompany an Ayurvedic physician for a long time. Only then can he distinguish between the various humors of *kapha*, *vayu* and *pitta*[1]. One must keep the company of him who practices the art of examining the pulse. (All laugh.)

"Can everybody tell the grade of yarn – what particular grade it is? You have to be a dealer in yarn. Or you have to work for some days with a dealer of yarn before you can tell whether the grade of the yarn is forty or forty-one."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna enjoys kirtan with devotees – he passes into samadhi

They are now going to start the kirtan. Drums are playing, Goshtha being one of the drummers. Singing has not yet begun, but the soft sound of the drum

[1] Phlegm, wind and bile

brings to mind Gauranga's group of devotees singing the name of the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna is becoming absorbed in ecstasy. Every now and then he glances at the drummer and exclaims, "Ah! Ah! What joy! My hair stands on end!"

The singers ask which song should they sing. Sri Ramakrishna asks humbly, "Please sing something about Gauranga."

The kirtan begins. First they sing about the celestial beauty of Gauranga. It is followed by another song.

Song –

The beauty of Gauranga's face, filled with divine love, is brighter than the brightest gold.

His smile, which illumines the whole world, surpasses even the charm of a million moons shining in the autumn sky.

The kirtan sings of the beauty of Gauranga. The musicians add lines –

Friend, did you see the full moon?

It does not wane, it does not stain.

It illumines the devotee's heart.

The musician then sings: "His face is bathed in the nectar of a million moons." Hearing this line Thakur passes into samadhi.

The song goes on. After awhile Thakur regains outer consciousness. He suddenly stands up. Full of emotion and intoxicated with divine love like the *gopis* (milkmaids) of Vrindavan, he describes Krishna's beauty and joins the musician:

Friend, is it his beauty or because of some fault of my own?

In the three worlds, I see nothing but Krishna!

Thakur sings as he dances. The devotees watch him in amazement. The singer then sings: The *gopi* is speaking –

O flute, please stop. Can't you go to sleep?

He sings further –

How can it sleep?

It is lying on such a delicate and beautiful twig.

It is drinking the nectar from the Lord's lips and is being played with His fingers.

Sri Ramakrishna now takes his seat. The musician sings: Radha says, "Eyes gone, ears gone, nose gone; all my senses have departed! Oh, why have I been left alone?"

The last song is about the meeting of Radha and Krishna.

Radha is making a garland of flowers to place around the neck of Shyam.

While she is doing so, she sees Shyam, the treasure of all good qualities.

Song – Radha meets Sri Krishna

The lovelorn Radha lies in the Nidhu grove of Vrindavan absorbed in the thoughts of Krishna.

No simile can describe the beauty of these two lovers, nor is there any limit to their love.

The one half shines like bright gold, the other half like blue sapphire.

A garland of wildflowers dangles from one side of the neck and from the other swing precious pearls.

A *makar kundal* (an ornamented earring) adorns half the ear; on the other half is a *rattan chabhi* (an ornament).

On one half of the forehead is the glow of the moon and on the other half that of the sun.

On half of the forehead waves the peacock feather and on the other half a braid.

And gleams there the golden lotus, too, and the serpent ready to disgorge a jewel.

The kirtan ends. Thakur utters the mantra, "Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan (the Lord, the devotee and His Word are one)." He prostrates himself again and again. He bows to the devotees all around him. Next he takes the dust of the ground where the kirtan was sung.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and God with form and without form

It is about 9:30 in the evening. Mother Annapurna's presence has illuminated the worship hall. Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees stand in front of Her. Surendra, Rakhal, Kedar, M., Ram, Manomohan and other devotees are present. They have all taken prasad with Thakur. Surendra fed them to their heart's content. Now Sri Ramakrishna is to return to Dakshineswar. The devotees also must go home. They have all gathered in the worship hall.

Surendra (to Sri Ramakrishna) — Today we have not repeated the Mother's name even once.

Sri Ramakrishna (pointing at the deity) — Ah, how beautiful the hall looks, as if the Mother Herself has illumined it! How much joy is there in having Her darshan in this manner! All sensuous desires, all sorrows, flee. Can one have the vision of the Formless God as well? Surely one can. But it is not possible if you have the least worldliness. The rishis meditated on the

Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute after giving up everything worldly.

"The Brahmajnanis[1] sing about Him as the unchanging and unmoving entity. I don't like it. One who sings like this apparently does not enjoy God's sweetness. When you are deluded by treacle, you don't think of syrup made with sugar candy.

"Just see, how you people are having visions with your physical eyes and enjoying the sight. They who talk of the Formless One get nothing – neither within nor without."

Sri Ramakrishna now sings the Mother's name.

Song –

O Mother, ever blissful as You are,

Do not deprive me of bliss.

My mind knows nothing but Your lotus feet.

The king of Death scolds me.

Tell me, Mother, what I shall say to him?

My only desire was to cross the sea of the world with the name of 'Bhavani' on my lips.

I did not even dream, O Mother,

That You would drown me in this shoreless, fathomless sea!

I swim night and day in the name of Durga.

Even so, there is no end to my sorrow.

If I die this time, O the Beloved of Shiva!

Nobody will ever repeat Your name, O Durga.

And then he sings.

[1] Referring to the members of Brahmo Samaj

Song –

Let us utter, utter the name of Durga.

He who treads his path saying, 'Durga, Durga, Durga,' is protected by Her with the trident in Her hand.

You are the day, You are the evening, You are the night.

At one time, You art Purusha[1] and at another the Eternal Female.

You ask me to leave You, but that I shall never do;

I shall be the ankle-bells ringing on Your feet;

I shall be the fish in water and You will catch me in Your claws,

When You soar high in the sky like a kite,

O Mother Brahmamayi[2],

My life shall be rent asunder at one cruel scratch of Your claw.

Do, then, give me Your two red feet as refuge.

Sri Ramakrishna pays his obeisance again to the image of the deity. As he goes downstairs, he calls out, "Rakhal, are my shoes there?"

Sri Ramakrishna enters the carriage. Surendra salutes him. The other devotees also salute him. The street is still lighted by the moon. Thakur's carriage moves toward Dakshineswar.

[1] The Self, the Absolute, Spirit. Pure Consciousness, the witness of the changes of Prakriti

[2] The All Blissful Mother

Section V

Sri Ramakrishna at a Devotee's House in Calcutta

Chapter I

Ramchandra Dutta's house – Sri Ramakrishna enjoys the kirtan

It is Saturday, 2 June, 1883, the dark fortnight of the month of Vaishakh. It is an auspicious day when Thakur comes to visit Calcutta. From Balaram's home he goes to Adhar's. Having heard the *kalahantrita*[1] kirtan he comes to Ram's house in Madhurai Street at Shimulia.

Ramchandra, who had qualified in medicine, was first an assistant chemical examiner in the Medical College. Later, he became a professor of chemistry in Science Association. He built his house with his own money. Thakur has visited his house on several auspicious occasions; consequently, it has become a very holy spot of pilgrimage for the devotees. By the grace of the Guru, Ramchandra is trying to lead the spiritual life of a householder. Sri Ramakrishna profusely praises Ram. He says, "Ram invites devotees to his house and serves them very well!" His house has become a special meeting place of the devotees. Nityagopal, Latu and Tarak [later Swami Shivananda] have become like members of Ramchandra's own family. They have lived with him for several days. Besides, Narayana[2] is worshipped there daily.

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[1] Expressing regret at separation as a result of insult hurled by a lover. Here it indicates pangs of separation of Radha from Krishna.

[2] Lord Vishnu

Ram first invited Sri Ramakrishna to his home on the Phuldolan[1] day – it was the full moon day of Vaishakh. On this day nearly every year he invites Sri Ramakrishna with his devotees to celebrate the festival. Many of Ramchandra's disciples, who are like his own children, continue to celebrate it.

Today the festival will be at Ram's residence, which the Lord [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] is to visit. So Ram has arranged a reading of the Srimad Bhagavata. Though the courtyard is small, a great deal has been arranged in it. There is a canopied dais for the pundit to sit while reading the story of Raja Harischandra from the Srimad Bhagavata. When Thakur arrives from his visits to Balaram and Adhar, Ramchandra goes to him to take the dust of his feet. He then accompanies Thakur to a prearranged seat in front of the dais. He is surrounded by devotees. M. is seated close to him.

Sri Ramakrishna and the story of Raja Harischandra

The story of Raja Harischandra continues. Vishwamitra said, "Maharaj, you have given me the whole earth along with the oceans! Thus you do not have the right to stay at any one place. Even so, you may go to live in the holy city of Kashi *dham*[2]. It is the city of Mahadeva (Shiva). Come, let me take you and your wife, Shaibya, and your son. There, you may collect the offering for me." Saying so, Bhagavan Vishwamitra accompanied the king to Kashi, where they visited the temple of Vishveshvara (Lord Shiva).

As soon as the visit to Vishveshvara Shiva is mentioned, Thakur becomes absorbed in ecstasy. He indistinctly utters, "Shiva, Shiva."

King Harischandra could not make the promised offering, so he sold Shaibya. His son,

[1] A festival held in honour of Sri Krishna on the full moon day of Vaishakh. A swing of flowers is decorated for Sri Krishna on this day.
[2] Place of pilgrimage

Rohitashava, went with Shaibya. The pundit also narrates the story of Rohitashava picking flowers at his brahmin master's house. A snake bit him in the garden and he died in the deep darkness of night. There was no one to cremate him. The old brahmin did not leave his bed. Shaibya, all alone, picked up the body of her son in her lap and started for the cremation ground. Every now and then thunder and lightning flashed among the clouds. It was as if lightning was playing again and again in order to pierce the darkness. Shaibya cried as she went, sorrow-stricken and full of fear.

Because he was unable to collect the entire money for the offering, Harischandra sold himself to a *chandala* (pariah). Having then turned into a chandala himself, he earned a small fee from cremating dead bodies. Many dead bodies burned, while others had already been reduced to ashes. How terrible the cremation ground was in the dark night. Shaibya reached it, weeping bitterly. The sound of her cries would rend any heart. What human being does not feel his heart melt to hear this story? All the listeners begin to cry loudly.

What is Thakur doing while listening to the story? He is sitting absolutely still, silent. Once a tear falls from the corner of his eye and he wipes it away. Why does he not cry out restlessly like the others?

The story continues. At last Vishwamitra came and revived Rohitashava. Everyone visited the temple of Vishveshvara Shiva. The pundit ends his reading by narrting that Harischandra's throne was restored to him. Thakur has sat in front of the dais listening to the holy story for a long time. When the story ends, he goes to the outer room and sits down. The devotees and the pundit narrator follow him and sit around him. Thakur requests the pundit to narrate the story of Uddhava.

Liberation and bhakti – the love of gopis – gopis don't want liberation

The narrator says – When Uddhava came to Vrindavan, the cowherd boys and the milkmaids of Braja ran eagerly to meet him. They asked him, "How is Sri Krishna? Has he forgotten us? Does he remember us?" Some of them began to cry, others took him to different parts of Vrindavan, saying, "At this spot Sri Krishna lifted Mount Govardhan on his finger. Here he slayed Dhenukasur. Here he slayed Shaktasur[1]. He grazed his cows in this pasture. He wandered here on the bank of the Jamuna and played here with the cowherd boys. He talked with the gopis in this grove." Uddhava said, "Why are you so anxious about Sri Krishna? He is omnipresent. He is God Himself. There is nothing besides him." The gopis said, "All this is beyond our comprehension. We are not educated. We only know our Krishna of Vrindavan who played with us here."

Uddhava said, "He is the very presence of Bhagavan. If you meditate on him, you do not have to come to this world. Meditation on him liberates the *jiva* (embodied soul)." The gopis said, "We don't understand all this talk about liberation and such. We only want to see our Krishna, the beloved of our soul."

Sri Ramakrishna listens to all the conversation with full attention and goes into bhava. He says, "The gopis are right." Then he begins to sing in the same sweet voice –

I am not hesitant to grant *mukti* (liberation). I hesitate to grant pure bhakti.

Who wins pure love surpasses all. He is served by all.

He triumphs over the three worlds.

Listen, O Chandravali[2], I will tell you of love.

One may gain liberation but rare indeed is bhakti.

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[1] Dhenukasur and Shaktasur were demons sent by Kamsa to kill Sri Krishna

[2] One of the gopis at Vrindavan

> Because of bhakti I became King Bali's doorkeeper in the nether world.
>
> Only in Vrindavan can one find pure love.
>
> But for cowherd boys and milkmaids none knows its secret.
>
> Because of bhakti in Nanda's house, taking him as my father, I carried his burden on my head.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the narrator) — The bhakti of the gopis is *prema* bhakti[1]. It is *avyabhicharini*[2] and single-minded bhakti. Do you know what *vyabhicharini*[3] bhakti is? It is bhakti mixed with jnana. In it one believes that Krishna has become all – he is the Supreme Brahman, he is Rama, he is Shiva and he is Shakti. But prema bhakti is not mixed with jnana. Hanuman came to Dwaraka and said, 'I want to see Sita and Rama.' Bhagavan [Sri Krishna] said to Rukmini, 'Please assume the form of Sita. Otherwise, there will be no escape from Hanuman.' When the Pandavas were performing Rajasuya Yajna, many kings were present. They all made Yudhisthira sit on his throne and paid obeisance to him. Bibhishana said, 'I shall only pay obeisance to Narayana (Vishnu) and to none else.' Then Sri Krishna himself lay prostrate before Yudhisthira to pay his obeisance. Thereafter, Bibhishana did the same, with his crown on his head.

"Do you know what it is like? It is like a bride in the family. She serves her husband's younger and elder brothers, his father and also her own husband. She gives them water to wash their feet and a towel. She provides a low wooden seat for them all. But she has quite another type of relationship with her husband.

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[1] Ecstatic love for the Lord
[2] Unalloyed; non straying
[3] Disloyal to one's ideal; unchaste

"Prema bhakti is comprised of the two feelings, 'I' and 'mine'. Yashoda thinks, 'Who will look after Gopal (Krishna) if *I* don't do so? He may fall ill if *I* don't.' Yashoda does not know that Krishna is Bhagavan Himself. On the other hand, she feels, 'He is *mine*.' She knew: Krishna is *mine*, that Gopal is *my* own. Uddhava said, 'Your Krishna is Bhagavan Himself. He is the Lord of the Universe. He is no ordinary being.' Yashoda replied, 'I am not asking you about your Lord. I am asking you about my Gopal – my Gopal, not the Lord.'

"What single-minded devotion the gopis had! Only after many, many entreaties to enter the royal court did the doorkeeper take them to Krishna. But when they saw a person with a turban, they stood with bowed heads. 'Who is this person with a turban?' they asked among themselves. 'Shall we lose our chastity by talking to this man? Where is the beloved of our souls who wears yellow robes and a crest of peacock feathers?'

"See, what single-minded devotion they had for Him! A unique kind of mood persists in Vrindavan. People around Dwaraka worship Krishna, Arjuna's friend. They have little regard for Radha."

Firm faith of gopis – jnana bhakti and prema bhakti

A Devotee — Which is better: bhakti mixed with jnana or prema bhakti?

Sri Ramakrishna — Unless one has intense love for the Lord, one cannot attain prema bhakti (ecstatic love) and does not consider Him as one's very own. Three friends were going through a forest when they saw a tiger. One of them said, 'Brother, we are done for.' The second said, 'Why should we die? Let's call on the Lord.' And the third one said, 'No, why trouble Him? Come, let's climb a tree!'

"The person who said, 'We are done for,' did not know that the Lord is the savior. He who said, 'Let's call on the Lord,' was a jnani. He knew that the Lord creates, preserves and dissolves. And he who said, 'Why should we trouble Him? Come, let's climb a tree,' had prema (intense love) in his heart; he had deep love for God. Such a love has this characteristic: the one who has it considers himself more powerful than the beloved. He does not want his beloved troubled. He wants to save his beloved from even the prick of a thorn."

Ram takes Thakur and the devotees upstairs and serves them several kinds of sweets. The devotees take the prasad full of joy.

Section VI

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Kali Temple in Dakshineswar

Chapter I

With devotees in Dakshineswar – on the Phalaharini puja day

Manilal, Trailokya, Biswas, Ram Chatterji, Balaram, Narendra and Rakhal

The fourteenth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Jaishtha. People are fasting on this fourteenth day of savitri[1]. The Phalaharini puja[2] will be celebrated at night on the last day of the dark fortnight. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in the shrine of the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. The devotees are coming to see him. It is Monday, 4 June, 1883.

M. had visited Sri Ramakrishna last Sunday. The Katyayani puja[3] was held last night. Thakur, full of emotion, stands in front of the Mother in the natmandir. He says –

Mother, You are the Katyayani of Braja. You are heaven, You are the earth. And You are the nether world.

Hari, Brahma, the twelve Gopals, ten great sciences and ten avatars have all originated out of You.

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[1] On this day a fast is kept by Hindu married women

[2] On this day the Divine Mother is worshipped as the consumer of the karmas of the devotee

[3] Worship of Goddess Durga

This time You shall have to take me across by any means.

Thakur sings and talks to the Mother. He is fully intoxicated with divine love. Now he goes to his room and sits down on his cot.

The Mother was worshipped until midnight.

The following morning, a Monday, Balaram and some other devotees have arrived. Trailokya and other proprietors of the garden have come with their families for the Phalaharini puja.

It is nine o'clock. Thakur sits on the round verandah overlooking the Ganges with a smile on his face. Playfully he places Rakhal's head on his lap – Rakhal is lying down. For some days, Thakur has regarded Rakhal as Gopala (baby Krishna).

Trailokya is going to the temple for Mother Kali's darshan. On his way he passes Thakur's room. Attendants holding an umbrella accompany him. Sri Ramakrishna exclaims, "Rakhal, get up."

Sri Ramakrishna sits up and Trailokya bows down to him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Brother, was there no *yatra* (musical performance) yesterday?

Trailokya — No, it could not be arranged.

Ramakrishna — Well, let it pass this time, but you must see to it that it is not forgotten in the future. One must continue to observe the injunctions.

Trailokya, assenting, leaves. Shortly after, Ram Chatterji, the priest of the Vishnu temple, arrives.

Sri Ramakrishna — Ram, I said to Trailokya, 'The yatra was not performed. You must see to it that it is not forgotten in future.' Should I have said that?

Ram Chatterji — Sir, what is wrong with it? You were right. One must follow the traditions.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Balaram) — Please eat here today.

Before the meal, Thakur tells the devotees a number of things about his spiritual state. Rakhal, Balaram, M., Ramlal and one or two other devotees are present.

Sri Ramakrishna is angry with Hazra – seeing God in man

Sri Ramakrishna — Hazra used to instruct me, saying, 'Why do you think so much about the young men?' One day in a carriage on the way to Balaram's house, I was very worried about it. I said to the Mother, 'Mother, Hazra asks why I think so much of Narendra and the other young men. He asks why I spend so much time worrying about them, instead of meditating.' While I was saying this, She immediately showed me that She had indeed become a human being. One can clearly see Her in a very pure mind. Having seen Her form, when I came down a little from samadhi, I was very angry with Hazra. I said to myself, 'That rascal has defiled my mind!' Then I said, 'Well, after all, he was not to be blamed. How could he know?'

Sri Ramakrishna's first meeting with Narendra

"I see the young men as the very manifestations of Narayana. When I met Narendra for the first time, I noticed that he did not have body consciousness. I just touched his chest with my hand and he lost all external

consciousness. When he returned to his normal state, he exclaimed, 'I say, what did you do to me? I have my father and mother!' This happened in Jadu Mallick's house. Gradually, I felt more and more longing to see him. I became restless for him. Then I asked Bholanath[1], 'I say, brother, what is the matter with me? There is a boy, kayastha by caste, named Narendra. Why do I feel such attraction for him?' Bholanath told me, 'The *Mahabharata* explains it. When the mind of a person who goes into samadhi comes down, he wants to live and associate with sattvic people. He feels contented only when he meets such people.' When I heard this that I was at peace with myself. At times I sat down and wept to see Narendra."

Chapter II

His Earlier Story: Sri Ramakrishna intoxicated in divine mood and his vision of God's form

Sri Ramakrishna — Oh, what a state I was in! When I had this state, I didn't know how days and nights passed by. Everybody said that I had gone mad. So they married me off. I was in a state of divine madness. First I was worried for my wife. Then I thought, 'Well, she can live, eat and drink normally, as I do.' I went to my father-in-law's house where a big kirtan was being performed. Nafar, Digambar Bannerji's father, and others attended it. There was a lot of devotional music. At times I felt worried about the future. Then I said to the Mother, 'Mother, if the *zemindar* (landlord) of the village talks to me and shows me his respect, I will know that all my spiritual realizations are true.' And he did come on his own to talk to me nicely.

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[1] Bholanath was a clerk in the Kali Temple. Later he became the treasurer.

His Earlier Story: Worship of sundari[1] and kumari[2] – witnesses Ramlila and balloon in the Maidan – feeding of cowherd boys in Sihore – with Mathur in his Janbazar house

"What a state I passed through! A very ordinary thing would at once fill me with inspiration. I worshipped *sundari*. She was a fourteen-year old girl. I saw her as the manifestation of Mother Herself. I offered her a rupee and bowed down to her.

"I went to see Ramlila[3]. I saw the real Sita, Rama, Lakshmana, and Bibhishana before me. So I worshipped all the actors who were playing these parts.

"I invited *kumaris* and worshipped them. I saw them as the Mother Herself.

"One day I saw a girl in blue robes standing under a bakul tree. She was a prostitute, but my mind at once became filled with Sita. Instead of the girl, I saw Sita herself coming to Rama after being freed from Lanka. For a long time I was unconscious, in the state of samadhi.

"Another day I went for a walk in the Fort Maidan. A big crowd had gathered to watch a balloon being released. My eyes fell on a European boy leaning against a tree with his body bent in three places. My mind was at once filled with the consciousness of Sri Krishna, and I passed into samadhi.

"In Sihore I served snacks and drinks to cowherd boys, as though they were real cowherds of Braja. Then I ate them too.

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[1] A beautiful girl
[2] An unmarried young girl
[3] Play of Lord Rama

"I often lost consciousness, so Mathur Babu kept me with him in his Janbazar house for a number of days. I felt as though I had truly become a maid of the Mother of the Universe. The women of the household were as comfortable and free with me as with a small boy or a girl. With the maidservant, I used to escort Mathur's daughter to her husband's room to sleep.

"Even now my mind is transported at the thought of the slightest thing. Before, I could not keep myself still when I saw Rakhal mumble while performing japa. I would immediately be transported by the thought of the Lord."

Sri Ramakrishna narrates many other things about his *prakriti* bhava (feminine state). He says, "I told a male musician about the tips of female musicians. He said, 'How well you do it! Where did you learn it?' " Thakur then begins to mimic a female musician, giving tips on how she sings. None of the devotees could keep from laughing.

Chapter III

Thakur with Manilal – an ocean of motiveless grace

Sri Ramakrishna is resting awhile after eating. He is not sleeping, but is a bit drowsy. Manilal Mallick, an old Brahmo devotee, enters and bows down to Thakur. He takes a seat. Thakur remains lying on his bed. Manilal talks to him casually. Thakur is half-asleep, half-awake. He responds to Manilal.

Manilal — Shivanath is all praise for Nityagopal. He says that Nityagopal is in a very nice spiritual state.

Thakur is still lying on his bed, his eyes a bit drowsy. He asks, "What does he say about Hazra?" Thakur

now sits up and talks to Manilal about Bhavanath's bhakti.

Sri Ramakrishna — Oh, what a nice spiritual state he is in! His eyes fill with tears when he sings. At the sight of Harish he goes into ecstasy. He says that Harish is truly a very good man. You see, Harish leaves his own house and stays here [at Dakshineswar] at times.

Sri Ramakrishna asks M., "Well, why does he have so much bhakti? Why do Bhavanath and others get inspired with God?"

M. remains silent.

Sri Ramakrishna — You know how it is? All men look alike on the outside, but some of them have 'sweetened milk' within. The *puli*[1] may have lentils for its filling, or sweetened milk. In both cases it looks alike. A filling of 'sweetened milk' is the desire to know the Lord and to have ecstatic love for Him.

Salvation and vision of one's own real Self by Guru's grace –Thakur grants fearlessness

Now Thakur grants fearlessness to the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Some think that they will never gain jnana and bhakti, that they are bound souls. But when the Guru's grace descends on someone, he need not fear. A tigress came into a flock of goats. When it sprang on its prey, it gave birth to a cub. The tigress died, but the cub grew up in the flock of goats. The goats ate grass and so did the cub. They bleated, so the cub also began to bleat. The cub grew to become a big tiger. One day another tiger happened to come into the flock of goats. It was amazed to see a tiger eating grass. It

[1] A ring shaped sweetmeat with some filling in it

ran toward it and grabbed it in its paws. The latter began to bleat. The wild tiger dragged it to a pond and said, 'Look at your face in this water. You are exactly like me. Here is some meat, eat it.' Saying so, it forced the meat into the mouth of the grass-eating tiger. It at first refused to take it and began to bleat, but having tasted blood, it began to eat the meat. The wild tiger said, 'Have you understood now? You are just like me. Now accompany me to the forest.'

"If the grace of the Guru dawns, there is no fear. The Guru makes you understand who you are, what your real nature is.

"If you practice a little spiritual disciplines, the Guru tells you everything: Do this now and that later. In time, one begins to understand what is real and what is unreal. The Lord is the Reality and the world illusory."

Even pretense of spiritual practice is useful – a *jivanmukta*[1] may live in household

"One night a fisherman was casting his net in a garden pond and stealing fish. When the owner of the garden came to know of it, he surrounded the fisherman with his men. They started searching for him with torches etc. In the meantime the fisherman had smeared his body with some ash and sat under a tree like a sadhu. The men looked for the fisherman everywhere, but could not find him. They only saw a sadhu with ash smeared on his body sitting under a tree meditating. The next day the whole neighbourhood was agog with the news that a sadhu of high spiritual attainment had arrived in the garden. Many people went to the sadhu and offered him flowers, fruits, sandesh and sweetmeats to show their respect. They also offered him

[1] One liberated in this very life

a lot of money. The fisherman said to himself, 'What a wonder! I am not a real sadhu. Yet people have so much devotion for me. Should I become a genuine sadhu, I would assuredly realize the Lord. There is no doubt about it.'

"Even the pretense of spiritual practice brought awakening. Had it been true *sadhana*, how much more awakening would one acquire? One would know what is real and what is illusory. The Lord, indeed, is the Reality and the world transitory."

A devotee is thinking, "Is the world transitory? The fisherman renounced the world. But what about those who continue to live in the world? Must they also renounce it?" Sri Ramakrishna, the ocean of motiveless grace, immediately says to M., "If a clerk is sent to jail, he has to finish his term there. But when he is released, does he begin to dance joyfully in the street to the beat of the drum? He again finds the job of a clerk and takes up his old profession. By the grace of the Guru, having acquired jnana, one continues to live in the household as a *jivanmukta*."

Saying so, Sri Ramakrishna grants fearlessness to the householders.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna with Manilal and others – God without-form

Manilal (to Sri Ramakrishna) — At what place should I meditate during my daily worship?

Sri Ramakrishna — The heart is a well-known place, meditate on God there.

Faith is all-important – Haladhari believes in the formless God – Sambhu's belief

> Manilal, a Brahmo devotee, believes in the formless God. Addressing him, Thakur says, "Kabir used to say that God with form was his mother and the formless God his father. And he added, 'Whom to slight and whom to worship? Both sides of the scales are even.' "

"Haladhari used to live with God with form during the day and the formless God at night. That is why, whichever bhava you adopt, you can succeed if you have the right kind of faith. Whether you believe in God with form, or in the formless God, you must have sincere faith."

His earlier story: The first ecstasy – is the Lord the doer or is it coincidence?

"Sambhu Mallick used to come to his garden on foot from Baghbazar. Somebody said to him, 'It is so far away, why don't you take a cab? Some misfortune could occur on the way.' Sambhu blushed with anger and said, 'What! I set out on my journey after repeating God's name. How can there be any unfortunate incident?' By having faith in Him, you can do anything! I used to say that I would believe only if I saw such and such person – if such and such accountant talked to me. At that time, whatever used to come to my mind would come to pass."

> M. had studied logic. He had read that it is just coincidence that morning dreams tally with actual events; that, in fact, it was just superstition. He had read this from a chapter on fallacies. So he asks Sri Ramakrishna –

M. — Well, did it ever happen that the actual event did not tally with what you thought?

Sri Ramakrishna — It always tallied. I would repeat His name and whatever I believed would come to pass. (To Manilal) But do you know the fact? Unless you are guileless and generous, you cannot have sincere faith.

"People with such physical traits as a neck bone that is too prominent, and hollow or squint eyes, do not easily acquire faith. 'It is a misfortune to meet bad omens such as a banana tree in the south, the *pui*[1] creeper in the north and a black tomcat passing in front of you!' "(All laugh.)

Thakur's compassion for Bhagavati, the maidservant – Sri Ramakrishna and a wife's chastity and faithfulness toward her husband

It is dusk. The maidservant comes and burns incense in the room. Manilal has left but there are still one or two people in the room. It is still and fragrant. Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot. Rakhal is also there.

After some time Bhagavati, the maidservant of the temple proprietor, salutes Sri Ramakrishna from a distance. Thakur asks her to sit down. Bhagavati has been serving for a very long time. She has been with the proprietor for several years. Thakur has known her for many years. Since childhood she has been temperamental, but Thakur is an ocean of compassion, a savior of the fallen. He talks to her about things in the past.

Sri Ramakrishna — You are getting old. Do you feed sadhus and Vaishnavas[2] with the money you earn?

Bhagavati (smiling) — How can I say that[3]?

[1] A creeper used as a pot herb

[2] Followers of Sri Chaitanya; worshippers of Lord Vishnu

[3] She means yes. In India people usually do not mention about their pious deeds.

Sri Ramakrishna — Have you been to Kashi, Vrindavan and so forth?

Bhagavati (a bit hesitant) — How can I say it myself? I have paid for building a ghat paved with stones and my name is engraved on one of the slabs.

Sri Ramakrishna — What are you saying?

Bhagavati —Yes, my name is engraved there as Srimati Bhagavati Devi.

Sri Ramakrishna — Nice, very nice indeed.

Now taking courage, Bhagavati takes the dust of Thakur's feet.

Sri Ramakrishna stands up stunned, uttering, "Govinda, Govinda," just like a person bitten by a scorpion is startled and stands up suddenly. There was the Ganges water in a pitcher in a corner of the room – it is still there. He reaches the pitcher out of breath, as if frightened, and starts washing the spot she had touched with the Ganges water.

One or two devotees present in the room watch this affair in silent amazement. The maid is seated there as if dead. Sri Ramakrishna, the ocean of compassion, the savior of the fallen, addresses the maid and says in a touching voice, "You may salute me from a distance." Saying this, he goes back to his seat and tries to make her forget the incident. He says, "Now listen to some songs." And he begins to sing.

Song –

The bee of my mind drinks deeply at the blue lotus-like feet of Mother Shyama.

At the blue lotus-like feet of Shyama, at the blue lotus-like feet of Mother Kali.

The honey of all worldly things – the flowers of lust and so on – has lost all charm for it.

The feet of the Mother are black-hued, so is the bee; black has mixed with black.

The five elements, turbulent and fascinating, have broken away on seeing this play.

It is only now that Kamalakanta has seen the fulfillment of his hopes.

Joys or sorrows are the same to him; the ocean of joy rolls on.

Song –

The kite of my mind was soaring high up in the sky of the feet of Mother Shyama.

The rough wind of 'faults' made it fall circling to the ground.

Maya's pull made it heavy and I could not raise it again.

It got entangled with the string of the love for wife and children.

Alas! The crest of jnana [of the kite] is rent. One may pull at it but it falls down.

It has lost its crest, so how can it fly? The six passions have overpowered it.

It was tied to the string of bhakti. While playing, it fell into illusion.

O Nareschandra! Rather then weep or laugh, it was better not to have come to play.

Song –

O my mind, live by yourself,

Don't go to any other's house.

Search within yourself,

You will find there all you are looking for.

I say, brother, He Himself is the philosopher's stone, the supreme wealth,

He can give you all you want.

At the door of *Chintamani* (wish-fulfilling gem; God) there are heaps and heaps of gems.

Section VII

Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna's first intoxication of divine love

His earlier story – Devendra Tagore, Dinaकान Mukherji and Kumar Singh

It is the last day of the dark fortnight, 5 June, 1883. Sri Ramakrishna is at the Kali Temple garden. Since it is Tuesday, not many visitors have come. It is on Sundays that there is a greater gathering of the devotees.

Rakhal and Hazra are with Sri Ramakrishna. Seating arrangements have been made on the verandah in front of Thakur's room. M. has been staying here since the previous Sunday.

The musical drama 'Krishna Yatra' was staged on Monday night in the natmandir of Mother Kali's temple. Thakur attended it for some time. This musical play was to have been staged on Sunday night, but was postponed until Monday.

After the midday meal, Thakur again narrates his state of divine ecstasy.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — What states of consciousness have I passed through! I did not eat here; I would go to the house of a brahmin, either in Baranagore or Dakshineswar or Ariadaha. And I would go there at the wrong time. I would go and just sit there without saying a word. If I was asked anything, I would only say that I wanted to eat there. I said nothing else. I

would go to Ram Chatterji's house in Alambazar. Sometimes, I went to the house of Savaran Choudhury of Dakshineswar. I did eat there, but I didn't like it. I found a distinctive smell of fish and meat.

"One day I decided to go to Devendra Tagore's [Ravindra Nath Tagore's father's] house. I said to Mathur Babu, 'Devendra repeats the Lord's name. I want to see him. Will you please take me to him?' Mathur Babu was a very arrogant person. He would not go to other people's houses easily. He tried to dissuade me but later said, 'Devendra and I were class fellows. I will take you to his house, baba (father).'

"Another day I heard that a fine person and devotee, Dina Mukherji, was living near the Baghbazar bridge. I approached Mathur Babu saying that I wanted to go to Dina Mukherji's house. Mathur Babu was helpless; he took me in his carriage. It was a modest house, and here was a great man in a big carriage. They, as well as we, felt embarrassed. He was celebrating his son's sacred thread ceremony. Where could he seat us? We were going to enter a nearby room when he said, 'There are women in that room, you may not go in.' Great embarrassment! When we left, Mathur Babu said to me, 'Baba, I shall no longer listen to you.' I laughed.

"What states have I passed through! Kumar Singh was giving a feast to the sadhus to which I was invited. When I got there, I found a number of sadhus present. I sat down and some of them asked who I was. As soon as they asked, I got up and sat down separately. I said to myself, 'What does it matter?' Later, when everyone was made to sit with leaf plates on the floor, I began to eat before anybody asked me to. I heard some sadhus saying, 'Look what he is doing!' "

Chapter II

Conversation with Hazra – dialogue between Guru and disciple

It is five o'clock. Thakur is sitting on a step close to the verandah. Rakhal, Hazra and M. are seated close to him. Hazra has the attitude of 'Soham[1]'.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Hazra) — To your way of thinking, all difficulties are over. It is He who is a believer and it is He who is an atheist; it is He who is good or bad. Besides, He is real and also unreal; that is, all the states of sleep etc. are also His. And then He is also beyond all states.

"A son was born to a peasant late in life. He raised the boy with great care. The boy grew up in time. One day the peasant was working in the field when somebody came to him and said, 'Your boy is seriously ill. He might not survive.' When the man reached home, his boy was dead. His wife was weeping bitterly but the eyes of the peasant remained dry. She complained to a neighbour sadly, 'He has lost such a nice son, but there is not a tear in his eye!' After a long time, the peasant said to his wife, 'You know why I am not crying? I had a dream last night. I saw that I had become a king and the father of seven sons. I also saw in the dream that the boys were people of great quality. As they grew, they acquired knowledge and religion. Then the dream ended. I say to myself: Should I cry for your one son – or those seven sons?' Jnanis believe that the state of dream is as true as the wakeful state.

"The Lord indeed is the doer. Everything happens according to His will."

Hazra — But it is very difficult to understand this. A sadhu of Bhukailas was tortured so terribly that he

[1] I am That

almost died. The sadhu was in samadhi. First they buried him, then they immersed him in water, and then they branded him with a hot iron. That is how he was brought back to consciousness. Because of such torture, he died. People tortured him, but he died by the Lord's will.

Problem of evil and immortality of soul

Sri Ramakrishna — One reaps the consequences of one's actions. By the Lord's will the sadhu who was in samadhi died. The Kaviraj makes *makaradhvaja* in bottles. They smear the bottles all around with mud and put them in a furnace. The gold in the bottles melts, gets mixed with other ingredients, and becomes *makaradhvaja*. The physician then carefully breaks the bottle and takes the *makaradhvaja* out. Obviously, the bottle is of use no longer – it makes no difference if it is or is not there. Similarly, though people killed the sadhu in ecstasy, perhaps he had already attained the goal. After attaining Bhagavan, what does it matter whether the body survives or dies?

Distinction between sadhu and avatar

"The sadhu from Bhukailas was in samadhi. Samadhi is of various kinds. My state tallied with what the sadhu of Rishikesh said. Sometimes I would find the spiritual current creeping up like an ant in my body, and sometimes it would hop up, just as a monkey jumps from one branch of the tree to another. Sometimes it moved like a fish. Only he who has experienced it can understand. He forgets the world. When his mind goes down a little, he prays, 'Mother! Please cure me. I would like to talk.'

"Unless one belongs to the class of *Ishvarakotis*[1], one cannot return to life after samadhi. Some people go into samadhi as a result of their sadhana, but they don't return. But when God Himself comes as a man, as an avatar, He has the key to the liberation of human beings in his hand. Then he returns from samadhi for the good of humanity."

M. (to himself) — Does Thakur hold the key to the liberation of human beings in his hand?

Hazra — One can succeed just by pleasing the Lord – even without the avatar.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Yes, yes. There is a big registration office in Vishnupur. If you get the deed registered there, you don't have to bother about the Goghat office!

Dialogue between Guru and disciple – life of Thakur narrated by himself

It is Tuesday, the day of new moon. It is dusk. Arati is being performed in the temple. Conch shells, bells and some instruments are being sounded in the twelve Shiva Temples, in Radhakanta's Temple and that of Mother Bhavatarini. After the arati is over, Sri Ramakrishna passes through his own room to the southern verandah. It is pitch dark, but lamps are lit at various places in the temple. The Bhagirathi (Ganges) reflects the dark sky on its bosom. It is the day of the new moon, and so Sri Ramakrishna has slipped easily into bhava. Today his bhava is becoming intense. From time to time he utters "Om"

1 Eternally free and perfect souls, born on earth for the good of mankind, with at least some of the characteristics of an avatar

and the Mother's name. It is hot weather. The room is very hot, so he has come to the verandah. A devotee's offering of a thinly woven mat is now spread on the verandah. These days Thakur thinks about the Divine Mother all the twenty-four hours. He talks in a whisper with Mani as he lies on the mat.

Sri Ramakrishna — Look, the Lord can be seen! So and so has seen Him. But please don't talk of it to others. Well, which one do you like better? God with form, or God without form?

Mani — At present I have greater liking for God without form. Even so, I am realizing gradually that He has taken all the different forms.

Sri Ramakrishna — Look, can you take me by carriage to the Mati Seal lake in Belgharia? If you throw a little puffed rice in the lake, all the fish gather to eat it. Oh, how the fish swim playfully! It is such a joyful sight! You will feel inspired, as if the fish of the Atman is sporting in the sea of Sachchidananda. In the same way if you stand in a big open field, you are inspired by the Lord – you feel as though you were a fish from an earthen pot which has jumped into the lake.

"You have to perform sadhana if you wish to see Him. I myself have undergone very hard austerities. How many kinds of spiritual disciplines have I practiced under the Bel tree! I would lie under the tree, crying, 'Mother, please reveal Yourself to me.' My body would become drenched with tears."

Mani — You have undergone so many spiritual disciplines. How can people succeed in a moment? Can one construct a wall just by moving a finger all around the room?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Amrita says, 'A man lights a fire and ten men take its heat sitting around it.' And then, this is very true: it is good to remain in the lila (divine play) after having attained the Nitya (Absolute).

Mani — You said that lila is for enjoyment.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, even the lila is real. Look, bring some little offering when you come to me. Perhaps I shouldn't say it myself, it may look egoistic, but I also say to Adhar, 'Please bring something worth one paisa.' To Bhavanath, I say, 'Buy me betel leaves for a paisa.' Have you noticed what bhakti Bhavanath has! Narendra and Bhavanath are like male and female. Bhavanath is Narendra's faithful follower. You must bring Narendra here in a carriage. Bring something to eat for him too. It will do you a great deal of good.

Philosophy and skepticism

"Jnana and bhakti are both paths to God-realization. In the path of bhakti, one has to observe more religious rules and rites. In the path of jnana, if somebody commits an unscriptural deed, it gets destroyed and does no harm. It is like a banana tree thrown into a roaring fire and is burnt.

"The path of jnana is the path of reasoning, which sometimes makes one become skeptical. In the case of a devotee who sincerely seeks Him, even if he becomes skeptical, he does not give up meditation on the Lord. If the ancestors of a person have been farmers, he does not give up farming, even if he has no crop for want of rain, or because of heavy rain in that year."

Lying down, Thakur rests his head on a big pillow and continues talking. He says to Mani, "My feet are aching. Please stroke them a little."

While rendering service to Thakur, the ocean of motiveless grace, Mani listens to the words of the *Vedas* issue from his holy lips.

Section VIII

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar Temple with Devotees

Chapter I

Conversation about householder life on Dasahara day in Dakshineswar

Rakhal, Adhar, M., Rakhal's father and his father's father-in-law are there

It is Friday, 15 June, 1883, Dasahara day, the tenth lunar day of the bright fortnight of Jaishtha. Devotees have come to see Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. On the occasion of Dasahara, Adhar and M. have a holiday.

Rakhal's father and his father's father-in-law have arrived. Rakhal's father is married for a second time. His wife's father had heard of Thakur a long time ago. He practices sadhana and has now come to see him. Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot after his meal. He glances at the father-in-law of Rakhal's father again and again. The devotees are sitting on the floor.

The Father-in-law — Sir, can one attain Bhagavan while living in the household?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Why not? Live like a mud fish. It lives in the mud, but the mud does not stain its body. Or live like a woman of easy virtue. She attends to all her household chores, but her mind remains tied to her lover. Fixing your mind on the Lord, attend to all your worldly work. But this is very difficult. I told the

Brahmos, 'You can't place tamarind pickles and a pitcher of water in the room of a patient suffering from delirium.' If you do, how will he recover? Just think of tamarind pickles and your mouth begins to water. For a man, woman is like tamarind pickles. Besides, the desire for sensuous enjoyment is ever there; it is like the pitcher of water. One can't find fault with this desire. It is that the patient wants to drink the whole pitcher of water! Oh, how very hard it is! Worldly life has so many problems. 'If the householder comes this way, he is hit with a stick and if he goes that way, he is beaten with a broom. If he follows another way, someone throws a shoe at him!' Besides, meditation on Bhagavan is not possible unless you practice in a solitary place. If you want to make an ornament after melting gold, but you are frequently called away, how will you be able to melt it? If you want to husk rice, you have to do it alone, by yourself. You have to occasionally pick out grains of rice to examine whether or not they are properly husked. If you are called away a number of times while husking, how will you complete the husking job properly?

What is the way? Develop deep dispassion (*vairagya*) – his earlier story – conversation with Gangaprasad

A Devotee — Sir, is there a way?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, there is. If you develop deep dispassion, you can succeed. What you know to be unreal should at once be given up forcibly. When I was ill, I was taken to Gangaprasad Sen. Gangaprasad said, 'You will have to take *swarnapatpati* (an Ayurvedic medicine preparation of gold). But don't drink water. Instead, take pomegranate juice.' Everybody wondered how I could do without water. I firmly resolved not to take it. I said to myself, 'I am a paramahamsa! I am no

ordinary *hamsa* (swan), I am a *rajahamsa* (king swan) – so I shall take milk[1].'

"One should live in solitude for some days. When you have touched the Grand-dame, there is no danger in being out of the game. Once you have been turned into gold, you can stay anywhere. If you gain bhakti by living in solitude, if you attain Bhagavan, you may even live in a family. (To Rakhal's father) That is why I ask these boys to stay here. They will develop love for Bhagavan by living here a few days. Then they can very well live in the family."

Vice and virtue – sannyasa a great panacea for malady of the world

A Devotee — If it is the Lord who does everything, why do we say that such and such act is sinful – or is good or bad? One commits sin also by His will.

The Father-in-law of Rakhal's Father — How can we understand what His will is? As Pope remarked: Thou Great First Cause, least understood[2].

Sri Ramakrishna —There is virtue as well as vice, but He is not tainted by them. There are good and bad smells in the air, but the air itself is free of them. It is the same with His creation. There are virtue and vice, real and unreal. In the case of trees, some bear mangoes, others jackfruit, and yet others hog-plums. You know, even wicked people are also needed. They send a ruffian to an estate where the inhabitants are rough. Then alone is the estate properly administered.

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[1] Hamsa has two meanings, one a swan and the other a desireless ascetic
[2] Alexander Pope, 2nd verse of "The Universal Prayer"

Sri Ramakrishna again talks about the life of the household.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Do you know what happens when you live as a householder? A lot of your mental powers are unnecessarily expended. This wastage of mental powers can be made up only by embracing sannyasa. Your father gives you your first birth. Your second birth is when your sacred thread ceremony is performed. And the third one is when you enter monastic life[1].

" 'Lust and greed.' These indeed are the two obstacles. The attachment to a woman leads one away from the path to the Lord. A man is unable to realize what has brought his downfall. When I went to the Fort, I hardly knew that I was going down a slope. When the carriage reached the Fort, I observed how far down I had come. Ah, She doesn't let man know! Captain said, 'My wife is spiritually wise.' When an evil spirit possesses a person, he does not know that he is possessed. He just says, 'I am all right.' (Everybody sits perfectly still.)

"It is not only lust which is a danger in family life. There is anger, too. When you are thwarted in your desire, you get angry."

M. — When a cat reaches out to snatch fish from my plate, I can't do anything about it.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why not? You must beat it once, there is no harm in that. The householder must hiss [threaten], but never pour venom. Reason? One must not harm anybody. However, you have to make a show

[1] Except ye be born again ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven – Christ (John 3)

of anger to save yourself from the enemy or he will hurt you. But one who has renounced need not even hiss.

A Devotee — Sir, it seems extremely difficult to attain Him while living a householder's life. How many householders can do it? We don't see such men!

Sri Ramakrishna — Why not? In the countryside [Kamarpukur], there is a Deputy [Magistrate] who is a great gentleman, Pratap Singh by name. He possesses many great qualities! He gives in charity, meditates and has developed love for the Lord. Once he sent for me. There are people like him.

Chapter II

Need of sadhana – faith in words of Guru – Vyasa's faith

Sri Ramakrishna — Sadhana (practice of spiritual disciplines) is essential. Why will you not succeed if you practice sadhana? If you have genuine faith, you don't have to work too hard. You must trust the Guru's words.

"Vyasadeva had to cross the Jamuna. The *gopis* (milkmaids) had to cross at the same time, but there was no ferry. The milkmaids said, 'Maharaj, what do we do?' Vyasadeva said, 'Well, I will take you across, but I am feeling very hungry. Do you have something for me to eat?' The milkmaids had milk and *khira* (sweetmeat of milk and rice) and also a lot of butter. Vyasadeva ate everything they had. 'Maharaj, what about our crossing?' the gopis asked. Vyasadeva then stood on the bank and said, 'Oh, Jamuna, if I have eaten nothing, let your waters part so that we may all cross.' As he said this, the waters parted. The gopis were amazed. They

said to themselves, 'He has eaten so much just now, yet he says that he has eaten nothing!'

"This is firm faith: It is not I, but Narayana within the heart who has eaten.

"Shankaracharya was a knower of Brahman, but initially he had ideas of differentiation. He did not have absolute faith in the oneness of God. One particular day he was coming up the steps after a bath in the Ganges when he chanced to touch the body of a *chandala* (pariah) carrying a load of meat. He exclaimed, 'Oh, I have touched you!' The *chandala* said, 'Master, you have not touched me, nor have I touched you. The pure Atman is neither the body, nor is it the five elements[1], or the twenty-four cosmic principles[2].' Shankara then realized the oneness of God.

"When Jadabharata, carrying the palanquin of King Rahugana, began to talk about knowledge of the Atman, the king came down from the palanquin and asked him who he was. Jadabharata said, 'I am not this, not that. I am pure Atman. I have full conviction that I am pure Atman.' "

Sri Ramakrishna and elements of yoga: yoga of jnana and yoga of bhakti

" 'I am That, I am the pure Atman' – this is the conviction of jnanis (men of spiritual wisdom). On the other hand, devotees say, 'It is all the manifestation of the glorious wealth of Bhagavan.' Were there no riches,

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[1] Earth, water, fire, air and space

[2] The twenty four cosmic principles are the following, viz. – the five gross elements (earth, water, fire, air, space); the five pranas (vital airs) (prana, udana, samana, vyana, apana); the five organs of sense; the five organs of work; the mind; the determinative faculty (buddhi); the ego; *chitta*. All belong to Prakriti, or Nature, and are different from Purusha or Consciousness.

how could you know a wealthy man? Yet it is a different matter if God, because of the devotion of an aspirant, says, 'You are indeed the same as I.' Suppose, on returning from the bazaar, a king's valet takes the king's seat and says, 'Sir, I am the same as you,' people would think that the valet is crazy. But suppose the king is so happy with his valet that he says one day, 'I say, come and sit beside me. It will not be wrong. You are indeed the same as I.' If the valet then goes and sits beside the king, there is nothing wrong with it. It is not right for an ordinary man to say that he is the same as the Lord. The wave comes from water, not water from the wave.

"The fact is that unless your mind is steady, there can be no yoga, whatever path you may take. The mind of a yogi is under his control. The yogi is not controlled by the mind.

"When the mind becomes steady, breathing stops and one experiences *kumbhaka*[1]. The same *kumbhaka* is experienced in Bhakti Yoga (path of devotion). The breath becomes suspended by following the path of devotion, too. As one repeats, 'My Nitai is like a mad elephant,' one is filled with a deep spiritual mood. Then one cannot complete the whole line. One says, 'Elephant, elephant!' and after that one is only able to say, 'Ele!'

"In the state of bhava, breathing is suspended and one experiences *kumbhaka*.

"Suppose someone is sweeping the floor with a broom and another person comes and tells him, 'Brother, so-and-so is no more. He is dead.' If the dead person is not related to him, the man with the broom goes on sweeping and says casually, 'Alas, is it so? The

[1] Suspension of breath

poor fellow is dead. He was such a good man.' And he goes on sweeping. If the deceased had been a near and dear one, the broom would have fallen from his hand and he would have sat down, exclaiming, 'Aie.' His breathing would have stopped and he wouldn't be able to think of the work he was doing. Don't you see this with women? If one of them stands still, amazed at seeing something or hearing some news, the other women say to her, 'I say, you have gone into bhava!' Here, too, the breathing has stopped. That is why she has become speechless, only able to exclaim 'Aie!' "

Marks of a jnani – *sadhanasiddha*[1] and *nityasiddha*[2]

"It doesn't help just to repeat Soham (I am That). There are marks of a jnani. Naren's eyes protrude. His eyes and forehead have good marks.

"Besides, everybody is not at the same level. There are four classes of human beings: the *baddha* jivas (bound ones), the *mumukshu* (seekers after liberation), the *mukta* (liberated) and the *nitya* jivas (ever-free). It is not that all these people have to take to sadhana (spiritual practice) – there are *nityasiddhas* (ever perfect) and *sadhanasiddhas* (perfected by sadhana). Some people attain the Lord after practicing a great deal of sadhana, while others are perfect from their birth, for example Prahlada. The Homa bird lives high up in the sky. When it lays its egg, it falls toward the earth. During the fall, the egg breaks and a chick emerges. Even then it goes on falling. It is still so high up that it develops its wings during its fall. When it is close to the earth, the chick realizes that if it hits the earth, it will be crushed. At once it shoots upward

[1] One perfected by devotional practices
[2] One perfected from birth; ever-perfect

toward its mother, uttering, 'Mother, mother, where are you?'

"The *nityasiddhas,* like Prahlada, practice sadhana later in life. They have already attained the Lord before the practice of sadhana. It is like the bottle gourd or the pumpkin which fruits before it flowers. (Looking at Rakhal's father) A *nityasiddha,* even if he is born in a lower family, does not become less spiritual than he was. The gram, even if it falls on a dung heap, still sprouts into a gram plant."

Vidyasagar and special manifestation of power in some – mere learning

"God has granted more power to some than to others. In one there is the light of a single earthen lamp, while in another it is a blazing torch. I recognized Vidyasagar's limit of intelligence from one of his remarks. I could see how far his intelligence went. When I told him that there was a special manifestation of God's power in some, Vidyasagar said, 'Sir, do you mean that He has granted more power to one and less to another?' I immediately replied, 'Indeed, it is so! Had there not been more power in one and less in another, why would you have become famous? It is when I heard of your learning, your charitable disposition and so forth that I came to see you. Of course, you have not grown two horns!' So learned, so famous is Vidyasagar to have said something so childish as: 'Has He granted more power to one and less to another?' You know how it is? The bigger fish like trout and carp are first to get caught in the net. Then the fisherman stirs the mud with his feet and minnows, mud fish and other small fish emerge and get caught in no time. If one has not realized the Lord, 'minnow and mud fish' come out of him. What does mere learning avail one?"

Section IX

Sri Ramakrishna in the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Distinction between a learned man and a sadhu – bhakti according to Narada enjoined for the age of Kali

Today is Wednesday, 26 September, 1883. It is the 10th day of the dark fortnight of the month of Bhadra. Fewer devotees visit Sri Ramakrishna on Wednesdays since it is a working day. Usually the devotees come on Sundays when they are at leisure. Free at half past one in the afternoon, M. reaches the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar to see Thakur at three o'clock. These days Rakhal and Latu are staying with Thakur most of the time. Kishori had arrived two hours earlier. Thakur is seated on the smaller cot in his room. On arriving, M. prostrates himself before him. After making polite enquiries, Thakur talks of Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Well, did you meet Narendra? (Laughing) He commented that I still visit the Kali Temple, but when I am cured of my madness, I will no longer go there.

"He comes here off and on. He tells me that the members of his family are very cross with him. The other day he came in a carriage. Surendra had paid the carriage fare, so Narendra's aunt (his father's sister) went to Surendra's house to protest. She created a row.

While talking of Narendra, Thakur stands up. He goes to the northeastern verandah and stands there.

Hazra, Kishori, Rakhal and others devotees are there. It is afternoon.

Sri Ramakrishna — How is it that you are here today? Don't you have school?

M. — Today the school closed at half past one.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why so early?

M. — Vidyasagar owns the school, so whenever he visits, the boys are given a holiday to celebrate.

Vidyasagar and holding on to truth – life of Thakur spoken with his own holy lips

Sri Ramakrishna — Why doesn't Vidyasagar keep his word?

Holding on to truth and viewing other women as Mother,

Tulsi is a liar, if you do not realize Hari by this means[1].

"If you stick to truth, you can attain Bhagavan. The other day Vidyasagar said that he would come here, but he didn't show up.

"There is a great difference between a learned man and a sadhu. The mind of one who is a mere scholar remains attached to 'lust and gold,' while the mind of a sadhu remains tied to the lotus feet of Hari. The learned man says one thing and does another. Leaving sadhus aside, even those whose minds are fixed on the lotus feet of Hari are very different in their actions and words. I saw a young sadhu belonging to the sect of Nanak in Kashi. He was the same age as you. He

[1] A saying of Tulsidas, a great sage and poet of India

would call me a *premi* (loving) sadhu. His monastery is in Kashi. One day he invited me there. The head monk of the monastery was no different from a housewife. I asked him, 'What is the way?' He replied, 'Bhakti according to Narada is enjoined for the age of Kali.' He was reading a holy text. When he finished it, he said, 'Vishnu in water, Vishnu on land, Vishnu on the hill top; Vishnu pervades the whole world.' He ended with: peace, peace and perfect peace."

Observance of Vedic rites not for the age of Kali – the path of jnana

"One day he was reading the *Gita*. He was so strict in his orthodoxy that he would not read it looking at a worldly man. Mathur Babu was present. The sadhu turned his back on him while reading. It was the same sadhu of the sect of Nanak who said, 'There is a way: it is the path of devotion as enjoined by Narada.'

M. — Aren't these sadhus Vedantists[1]?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, these people are Vedantists, but they also believe in the path of bhakti. The fact is, in the age of Kali it is difficult to observe Vedic rites and rituals. A person said that he would observe the *purashcharana*[2] of the Gayatri mantra. I asked, 'Why? For the age of Kali you have the Tantric path. Can you not perform *purashcharana* according to the *Tantra*?'

"Vedic observances are very difficult to perform. These days one slaves for others [like the British masters]. It is said that if you slave like this for twelve

[1] Believers in the non-dual Brahman

[2] The performance of japa a certain number of times each day, methodically increasing and decreasing the amount

years or so, you acquire the traits of the master. You imbibe the qualities of those for whom you have been slaving for so long. You take on their *rajas* and *tamas* and other qualities like violence and indulgence in sense pleasures while you serve them. Not only are you their slave, but you also receive a pension from them.

"A Vedantist sadhu visited here. He danced to see the clouds and thoroughly enjoyed himself when there was a rainstorm. If anybody approached him while he was meditating, he would get very angry. One day I went to him. Oh, how upset he was! He always discriminated: 'Brahman is the only Reality and the world an illusion.' The appearance of so many different forms is because of maya, so he carried a prism from a chandelier with him. Through a prism you see many different colors. In fact, there is no colour at all. In the same way, there is really nothing but Brahman. But because of maya and egotism one sees a diversity of things. Lest he should become infatuated and become attached to it, this sadhu would not look at anything more than once. While taking his bath, he would discriminate at the sight of birds flying overhead. Together we would go to ease ourselves. When he heard that it was the pond of a Muslim, he did not use its water. Haladhari tested him in grammar – he knew grammar. They talked of consonants. He was here for three days. One day, hearing the sound of the sanai[1] while he was on the river embankment, he said, 'He who has realized Brahman goes into samadhi hearing such music.' "

Chapter II

[1] A wooden flute

Sri Ramakrishna, the Guru, in Dakshineswar – he exhibits the state of a *paramahamsa*[1]

While talking about the sadhus, Sri Ramakrishna exhibits the state of a *paramahamsa*. His conduct is childlike, his face beams with laughter and there is no cloth around his waist, he is quite naked; his eyes swim with joy. He again sits on the smaller cot and speaks in his charming voice.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — I heard Vedanta from the Naked One (Totapuri): 'Brahman is the Reality and the world an illusion.' The magician performs so many magic feats: he produces a mango plant, even bearing mangoes. But all his magic is just sleight of hand. Only the magician is real.

Mani — Our life is like a long sleep. I understand it, but I do not see it correctly. The mind can't even understand the sky. How can that very mind understand the world rightly just by seeing it?

Sri Ramakrishna — There is another way of looking at it. Not being able to see the sky properly, it looks as though it were touching the earth. How can a man understand rightly when he is delirious with fever?

Sri Ramakrishna sings in a sweet voice about the delirious fever of mankind and Dhanavantri[2].

O Mother Shankari[3], O great physician, what delirious fever I suffer, in spite of the grace of Thy feet.

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[1] Highest class of saints who have attained supreme knowledge and sanctity

[2] An excellent physician; the name of the physician of heaven (according to Hindu mythology)

[3] An appellation of Goddess Durga

This perishable transitory pride of mine is consuming me in its flames. What depraved attachment I have developed for 'me and mine'!

How can I sustain my life? My desire for wealth and friends is ceaseless!

O the bestower of all goodness, I continue to indulge in things illusory, wrong doing, sinful acts and so on.

Says Dasharathi: My eyes are full of the deep sleep of maya,

And my stomach filled with the worm of violence. I am going round and round as in a whirlpool of illusory action.

Day and night I am feeling distaste for Your name. Alas! will I be cured of this malady?

Mani — I said to Kishori, 'There is nothing in a box – but two people are trying to snatch it from each other, thinking there's money in it!'

Trouble in taking up a body – to be or not to be! The world is a mansion of joy

"Well, the body is the sole cause of all troubles. Thinking this, the jnani says to himself, 'I would rather give up this pillow case[1]. Only that will save me.' "

Thakur is going toward the Kali Temple.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why? This world is a deceptive veil. But it is also called the mansion of joy.

Mani — There is no uninterrupted joy here.

Sri Ramakrishna — True indeed.

[1] Meaning the outer sheath, the body

Thakur is now standing in front of the Kali Temple. He prostrates before the Divine Mother. Mani does the same. Thakur sits on the floor before the Mother on the lower platform in front of the shrine. He is clad in a red-bordered dhoti with part of it wrapped around his back and one end over his shoulder. Behind him is a pillar of the natmandir. Mani is seated close to him.

Mani — If that is so, why should one take up a body at all? I think the body is only for practicing some Karma Yoga (action). Who knows what one is doing! It only brings suffering and tribulation.

Sri Ramakrishna — When a gram falls on a heap of filth, it still sprouts into a gram plant.

Mani — So be it. Even then, aren't there the eight bonds?

Sachchidananda is the Guru – liberation by the grace of the Guru

Sri Ramakrishna — Not the eight bonds, but eight fetters[1]. But let them be there! By His grace, these eight fetters fall off all at once. You know what it is like? Just as all darkness is dispelled in a moment when a light is brought into a room that has been dark for a thousand years. The darkness doesn't go bit by bit. Haven't you seen the magician performing his feats? Making knots in a cord, he ties one of its ends to something and holds the other end in his hand. Then he shakes the cord once or twice. When he gives a jerk, all the knots in the cord untie. But others can't untie a single knot, howsoever much they try. All the knots open in a moment by the grace of the Guru.

[1] Hatred, shame, ancestry, pride, fear, secretiveness, caste and grief

Sri Ramakrishna the agent of change in Keshab Sen

"Well, how has Keshab Sen changed so much lately? Tell me. He used to come here very often. He learned how to bow down here. One day I said to him, 'Sadhus are not saluted the way you do it.' One day I was going to Calcutta with Ishan in a carriage. He had heard many things about Keshab Sen. How beautifully Harish has expressed it: 'All the cheques have to be cleared here. Only then will the bank cash them.' "(Thakur laughs.)

Mani listens to all this conversation in wonder. He has understood that Sachchidananda Himself clears the cheques in the form of the Guru.

His earlier story – instructions of the Naked One – one cannot know God

Sri Ramakrishna — Don't reason. Who can know Him? The Naked One (Totapuri) said, 'I have heard that this universe is created out of only a portion of God.'

"Hazra is inclined to reason a lot. He calculates that the world is created with so much, and so much is the remainder. When I hear his arithmetic, my head begins to ache. I know that I know nothing. Sometimes I think of God as good, and at other times bad. How can I know Him?"

Mani — True sir, who can know Him? One knows Him only as far as one's intellect can go, but he thinks he has understood it all. It is just as you say: An ant went to a mound of sugar. Just a grain of it filled the ant's stomach. And yet it said, 'Next time I am going to carry the whole mound to my home.'

Can one know the Lord? Self-surrender the only way

Sri Ramakrishna — Who can know Him? I don't even try. I simply call, 'Mother! Mother!' Let Her do Her will. If it is Her will, She will let me know Her, otherwise not. I have the attitude of a kitten. A kitten only calls out, 'Mew, mew.' Its mother may place it anywhere – maybe in the kitchen or on the master's bed. A little child only wants its mother. It doesn't know of her riches. It doesn't even want to know. All it knows is that it has a mother. So it doesn't worry. The son of the housemaid also knows that he has a mother. When he quarrels with the son of the master of the house, he says, 'I am going to tell my mother. I have a mother.' I also have the attitude of a son.

Placing his hand on his chest and pointing to himself, Sri Ramakrishna says to Mani, "Well, is there anything here? What do you say?"

Mani is speechless as he looks at Thakur. Perhaps he is saying to himself, "Is the Divine Mother living in Thakur's heart? Is it the Mother who has taken up his body for the good of mankind?"

Section X

Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab Chandra Sen in the Lily Cottage

Chapter I

In front of Keshab's house – 'he looks for you with a yearning heart as you come'[1]

Keshab, Prasanna, Amrit, Umanath, Keshab's Mother, Rakhal and M.

Wednesday, 28 November, 1883. It is the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of Kartik. A devotee is pacing the footpath to the east of the Lily Cottage gate. He seems to be eagerly waiting for someone.

To the north of Lily Cottage is the Mangal Bari. A number of Brahmo devotees live there. Keshab lives in the Lily Cottage. His disease has worsened. Most people say, "It appears that there is not much chance of his recovering this time."

Sri Ramakrishna is very fond of Keshab. He is coming to see him today from the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. The devotee pacing outside is awaiting his arrival.

The Lily Cottage is situated on the western side of the Circular Road where he is walking. He has been waiting since 2:00 p.m. He sees many people on the road.

The Victoria College is situated on the eastern side of the road. A number of ladies from Keshab's Brahmo Samaj and their daughters study there. One can see deep into the school building from the road.

[1] A song by Jaydeva

To the north there is a big garden house inhabited by an English gentleman. The devotee on the road has been observing for a long time that there seems to be some misfortune in the house. A little later, he sees a coachman and a groom in black livery bringing a hearse. These arrangements have been going on for the last one-and-a-half or two hours.

Somebody has parted from this mortal world, hence all the arrangements.

The devotee wonders, "Where does one go when one leaves the body?"

A number of carriages rattle southward. The devotee is keenly watching them to see if Thakur is in one.

It is almost five o'clock when Thakur arrives in a carriage. He is accompanied by Latu and one or two other devotees. M. and Rakhal are also present.

Keshab's family members lead Thakur upstairs. There is a wooden cot on the verandah south of the drawing room. Thakur is invited to sit there.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi – he talks to the Divine Mother in ecstasy

Thakur has been sitting here for quite some time. He is impatiently awaiting Keshab. Keshab's disciples tell him humbly that Keshab is resting for awhile, but it will not be long before he comes.

Keshab suffers from a serious disease. His disciples and the members of his family, therefore, are very careful. Thakur is becoming more and more eager to see Keshab.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Keshab's disciples) — Look, what is the need for him to come? Why can't I go inside to see him?

Prasanna (humbly) — Sir, he will be here shortly.

Sri Ramakrishna — Go on, you're making an unnecessary fuss! Let me go in.

Prasanna talks about Keshab to divert Sri Ramakrishna's mind.

Prasanna — He is in a different state of mind. He talks to the Mother like you. The Mother speaks to him and he listens, laughs and cries.

"Keshab talks to the Mother of the Universe. Hearing Her, he sometimes laughs and sometimes weeps."

Thakur is overwhelmed with emotion on hearing this. He passes quickly into samadhi.

It is winter, so Thakur is clad in a warm coat of green cashmere with a shawl over it. His body is erect, his eyes fixed, he is completely merged in samadhi. He remains in this state for a long time. His samadhi is not coming to an end.

It is evening. Thakur comes down to a somewhat natural state. A lamp has been lighted in the adjacent parlour. They are all trying to take Thakur to that room. It is with great difficulty that they manage to do so.

There is a lot of furniture in the room: a couch, chairs, coat hanger and also a lamp. Thakur is made to sit on the couch.

As he sits down, he again loses outer-consciousness and merges in ecstasy.

Casting his glance on the couch, he mutters something like one intoxicated, "It was of some use before. What is the need for it now?"

(Looking at Rakhal, he says) "Rakhal, you have come!"

Vision of the Mother of the Universe and conversation with Her –immortality of the soul

What does Thakur behold as he talks? He says –

"O good! So You have come, Mother! How You show off in your Benarasi sari!

Mother, please don't trouble. Come and sit down. Do sit."

Thakur's ecstasy continues. The room is well lighted. Brahmo devotees are all around him. Latu, Rakhal, M. and others are also seated near him. Thakur talks spontaneously in the state of bhava.

"The body and the soul. The body has come and it will go. But the soul is immortal. It is just like the betel-nut. If the nut is ripe, its shell does not adhere to the nut. In the unripe state, it is very difficult to get the shell apart from the nut. When you have seen Her, when you have attained Her, body-consciousness vanishes – one feels that the soul is separate from the body."

Keshab enters the room by the eastern door. They who had seen him in the Brahmo Samaj temple or in the Town Hall are struck dumb seeing him. He is a veritable skeleton covered with skin. He is not able to stand up. He holds to the wall as he walks. It is with great difficulty that he sits down facing the couch.

In the meantime Thakur gets up from the couch and sits on the floor. Seeing Thakur, Keshab salutes him for a long time, lying prostrate on the floor. After the salutation, he sits up. Thakur is still

in the state of ecstasy. What is he saying to himself? He is talking to the Divine Mother.

Chapter III

Brahman and Shakti Indivisible – God's divine sport in man

Now Keshab raises his voice and says, "I have come, I have come." He holds Sri Ramakrishna's left hand and begins to stroke it gently. Thakur is intoxicated in bhava. He is saying many things spontaneously. All the devotees listen to him spellbound.

Sri Ramakrishna — As long as one retains one's *upadhis*[1], one has the perception of plurality and of persons, as Keshab, Prasanna, Amrita and so on. When one has attained ultimate jnana, one is aware that it is one Consciousness behind many things.

"Moreover, when one has acquired ultimate jnana, one sees that the same Consciousness has differentiated into the world, its creatures and the twenty-four cosmic principles.

"Even so, there is a special manifestation of God's power in some. Truly He has become all – but at certain places there is greater manifestation of His power, in others less.

"Vidyasagar asked, 'So, has God given more of His power to one and less of it to another?' I said, 'If it were not so, how could one person defeat fifty others? Besides, why should we have come to see you?'

"There is more power of God in that receptacle in which He manifests His lila (divine sport).

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[1] Adjuncts; semblances; the limitations imposed on the Self through ignorance by which one is bound to life.

"The landlord can be found anywhere in his estate but he is often to be seen in the drawing room. The heart of the devotee is the Lord's drawing room. He likes to enact His lila in the heart of a devotee. His power especially descends in the heart of a devotee.

"What are the signs of it? Wherever much work is done, there His power is especially manifested.

"The Adyashakti (Primeval Power) is not different from the Parabrahman (Supreme Brahman). You cannot think of the one without thinking of the other. For example, think of the gem and its lustre! If you do not hold a gem, you cannot think of its effulgence. Similarly, you cannot think of the gem without thinking of its brilliance. It is like the snake and its serpentine movement. Without thinking of the snake, you cannot think of its movement. Similarly, forgetting the wriggling movement of the snake, you cannot think of the snake."

Brahmo Samaj and seeing God in man – the difference between the aspirant and the perfected

"Adyashakti (the Primordial Power of Brahman) has differentiated into the phenomenal world, living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles. It is a case of involution and evolution[1].

"Why do I care so much for Rakhal, Narendra and the other young men? Hazra said, 'Why do you go about

[1] Involved, the totality of creation lies dormant in its potential state; evolved, it is differentiated into all that is. M. says in his Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Part I: You go backwards to the Supreme Being and your personality becomes lost in His personality. You then retrace your steps. You get back your ego (personality) and come back to the point where you started only to see that the world and your ego or self were involved in the same Supreme Being.

thinking of these young men? When will you give your mind to God?' (Keshab and others smile slightly.)

"This set me to thinking seriously about it. I said to the Divine Mother, 'What is this, Mother? Hazra asks why I think so much of the young men.' Then I asked Bholanath. Bholanath said, 'One can find the same illustration in the *Mahabharata*. When a person comes down from samadhi, where can he rest his mind? He cannot help seeking the company of devotees endowed with the quality of sattva.' This dictum of the *Mahabharata* at once relieved my mind. (All laugh.)

"Hazra is not to blame. When a person is a spiritual aspirant, he should give his whole mind to God, saying, 'Not this, not this.' It is different in the case of a perfected soul. After attaining God, one realizes the fact of involution and evolution. When the butter is taken out of the buttermilk, one realizes that the butter is not essentially different from the buttermilk, nor the buttermilk essentially different from the butter. One has full realization that God has become everything. Only at some places He manifests Himself in a greater degree than in others.

"When the ocean of ecstasy is agitated, even dry land is pole deep under water. Initially one must take the circuitous course of the river to reach the ocean. But when there is a flood, even dry land comes under pole-deep water. You can then row your boat straight to the ocean. You don't have to go roundabout along the course of the river. When the harvest of paddy has been reaped, one need no longer go around the balk – one may walk straight over the field to any point.

"After God-realization, one sees that God manifests Himself in all things. However, there is a greater degree of His manifestation in the human being. And He is manifested more in devotees endowed with

the quality of sattva – people who have no desire at all to enjoy 'lust and gold'. (Everyone is silent.) When a person comes down from samadhi, where can he rest his mind? He seeks the association of pure devotees endowed with sattva guna, who have given up the enjoyment of 'lust and gold'. Otherwise, with what will he engage himself?"

Brahmo Samaj and the Motherhood of God – the Mother of the Universe

"He who is Brahman is indeed the Adyashakti. When He is inactive, I call Him Brahman, I call Him Purusha. When He creates, preserves, dissolves and performs such other actions, I call Him Shakti, I call Him Prakriti. Purusha and Prakriti. He who is Purusha[1] is indeed Prakriti[2]. Together they constitute the *anandamaya* (All-Blissful male aspect of God) and *anandamayi* (All-Blissful female aspect of God).

"He who is aware of manhood is also aware of womanhood. He who knows the father also knows the mother. (Keshab laughs.)

"One who has a sense of darkness also has a sense of light. One who knows the meaning of night also knows the meaning of day. One who has the feeling of joy also has the feeling of grief. Do you see this?"

Keshab (laughing) — Yes sir, I do.

Sri Ramakrishna — What Mother do I mean? Why, the Mother of the Universe! She who has created the Universe is preserving it. She who is always protecting Her children and providing them what they want: *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kama*

[1] Male aspect of God
[2] Female aspect of God

(fulfillment of desires) and *moksha* (liberation). A true child cannot live apart from its mother. It is his mother who knows everything. The boy just eats, drinks and plays; he knows nothing.

Keshab — That is quite true.

Chapter IV

His earlier story – Brahmo Samaj and describing glories of the Lord

Sri Ramakrishna comes down to the sense world as he talks. He laughs and talks with Keshab. The room is full of people. They listen to Thakur with full attention, fixing their eyes on him. They observe that neither Thakur nor Keshab say, "How do you do?" or "How do you feel?" No words are spoken except about the Lord.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Keshab) — Why do the Brahmos dwell so much on the glory of God? 'Oh Lord, You have created the moon, you have made the sun and the stars!' What is the need of all this? Many people praise a garden when they see it. How many want to see the owner? What is greater, the garden or its owner?

"After drinking wine, who cares to enquire how much wine is in the wine shop? A single bottle suffices!"

His Earlier story – theft of jewelry in the shrine of Vishnu and Mathur Babu

"When I met Narendra, I never asked him who his father was or how many houses his father owned.

"You know how it is? Human beings admire wealth. So they think that the Lord, too, admires wealth. They think that if they praise God's riches, He

will be pleased. Sambhu said to me, 'Bless me so that I may die leaving all my wealth at His lotus feet.' I told him, 'It is wealth to you, but what can you give God? To Him all this is wood and dust!'

"When the jewelry in the shrine of Radhakanta was stolen, Mathur Babu and I went to the shrine. Mathur Babu said, 'Away with you, Bhagavan, you aren't worth anything! They took all the jewelry from your body but you could do nothing about it!' I asked him, 'What are you saying? Your jewels are no more than lumps of clay to Him. He who has Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth) as His Shakti (consort) is not always guarding the little offering of money that you make to Him. You should not speak in this way!'

"Does the Lord care for wealth? No, He is under the control of bhakti. What does He value? Not money but a feeling heart for Him, intense love, devotion, discrimination and dispassion for His sake."

The form of God depends upon the worshipper – the *trigunatita*[1] devotee

"One's idea of God varies according to one's nature. The devotee with the quality of tamas sees that the Divine Mother eats meat, so he sacrifices a goat for Her. The devotee of *rajasic* qualities prepares rice and different kinds of dishes to offer Her. The devotee with the quality of *sattva* does not like to make a show of his worship to the world. In fact, people don't even know that he worships. In the absence of flowers, he offers worship with vilwa leaves and water of the Ganges. He just offers a handful of sugared puffed rice or *batasas* (sweet cakes) for the deity's dinner. At times he may offer a little *payas* (rice with milk pudding).

[1] Beyond the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas

"And then there are the *trigunatita* devotees [who are beyond the three qualities of nature]. They are like children. Their worship consists purely of chanting His name. Yes, the name of God alone and nothing else."

Chapter V

Conversation with Keshab – treatment of the Atman in the Lord's hospital

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing, to Keshab) — You are ill. Well, there is a reason for it. The intense devotional feeling within you has disturbed your body. When one is emotionally surcharged, one doesn't understand what happens. Much later, you see that it has wreaked havoc on the body. I have noticed that when a big steamer is sailing in the Ganges, one is not aware of it. But lo! After awhile, one sees that waves of water are splashing against the bank, causing great commotion! Sometimes the water may break the bank, washing off portions of it.

"An elephant entering a hut soon makes it totter to its foundations and at last pulls it down. The elephant of bhava has entered the cottage of your body and is creating havoc there.

"Do you know how it happens? When a house catches fire, many things are burned and there is much noise and confusion. The fire of spiritual wisdom first burns up lust, anger and other such enemies. Later it destroys the sense of I-ness[1]. Lastly, it brings about a great turmoil [in the body].

"You may be thinking it is all over. But it isn't – as long as the least trace of disease remains uncured, He does not release you. If your name has been entered as a

[1] The false ego that says 'I am the doer'

patient in the hospital books, you cannot get away. The physician in charge (Doctor Sahib) doesn't allow you to leave the hospital while the least trace of disease remains. Why did you get your name entered in the hospital books?" (All laugh.)

Hearing of the hospital, Keshab laughs again and again – he is not able to control his laughter. He stops for awhile but laughs again. Thakur continues talking.

His Earlier Story: Sri Ramakrishna's illness – treatment by Kaviraj Rama

Sri Ramakrishna (to Keshab) — Hriday used to say, 'I have never witnessed such bhava (fervour) and such illness, too.' I was at the time very ill with diarrhea of a rather severe type. And it seemed like myriads of ants were eating into my brain. But the words I spoke night and day were all concerning the Lord. Rama Kaviraj of Natagore came to treat me. He saw me sitting and talking to people and he said, 'Has this man gone totally out of his wits that he goes on talking like that with a body made of mere skin and a couple of bones?'

(To Keshab) "Everything is ordained by Her will. Thou doest Thy will alone, oh Mother Divine.

"Thou doest Thy will alone, O Mother Divine. O Tara, Thou art free to will.

Thou doest Thine Own work, Mother. But (foolish) man takes all credit to himself, saying, 'It is I who have done it.' "

"The gardener clears the soil round the roots of the Basra[1] rose to give it the benefit of the night dew. The dew adds freshness and strength to the plant. I think

[1] A superior quality rose

that He is digging round about you to the very roots. (Thakur and Keshab laugh.) It seems that when you come next time, your work will be greater and more abiding than ever."

Sri Ramakrishna wept for Keshab and vowed to offer a green coconut and sugar to Mother Siddheshwari

"Whenever I hear that you are ill, my heart is sorely troubled. The last time you were unwell, I wept during the last part of the night and prayed, 'Mother, if something untoward happens to Keshab, with whom shall I talk?' Then I went to Calcutta and presented offerings of green coconut and sugar to Mother Siddheshwari. I prayed to the Mother for your welfare.

Everyone looks with wonder and amazement on Thakur's unspeakable love and anxiety for Keshab.

Sri Ramakrishna — This time, however, I have not felt it so much. I must tell you the truth.

"But I did feel a little worried for two or three days."

The venerable mother of Keshab comes to the eastern door, by which Keshab had entered the drawing room. Umanath says to Sri Ramakrishna, who is seated near the door, "Here is mother bowing down to you."

Sri Ramakrishna smiles. Umanath says, "The mother asks you to bless him so that he may get well soon." Sri Ramakrishna says, "Offer your prayers to the Divine Mother who is Bliss everlasting. It is only She who removes all troubles."

He says to Keshab –

"It would be better for you not to stay in the inner apartments for long hours. With children around you, you run the risk of sinking in the sea of ignorance. You will feel better if you only talk about the Lord."

Having spoken so solemnly, Sri Ramakrishna laughs like a child. He says to Keshab, "Here, let me examine your hand." He feels the weight of Keshab's hand, like boys do. At last he says, "No, your hand is light enough. It is only the hands of those who think evil and do evil that are not." (All laugh.)

Umanath again addresses Sri Ramakrishna from the door: "Mother requests you to bless Keshab."

Sri Ramakrishna (gravely) — What power do I have? She alone can bless. Thou doest Thine Own work, Mother. But (foolish) man takes all the credit to himself, saying, 'It is I who have done it.'

"It is on two different occasions that the Lord smiles. One is when two brothers divide a field between themselves. They measure it with a rope and say, 'This side is mine and that is yours.' The Lord laughs, thinking: The universe is Mine. These fellows take little parts of it and say, 'This side is mine and that is yours.'

"The Lord laughs a second time. The son is suffering from a serious disease. His mother is weeping. The physician comes and says, 'Fear not, mother, I shall cure him.' The physician doesn't know that nobody has the power to save when the Lord slays." (Everybody is agape with wonder.)

Just at this moment, Keshab begins to cough – he coughs for a long time. It doesn't stop. Everybody feels sad hearing him coughing. After a long time, the cough stops for awhile. Keshab is not able to stay in the room any longer. He prostrates himself to salute Sri Ramakrishna, his head touching the ground.

Then, with great difficulty, holding to the wall, he slowly goes back to his room by the same door.

Chapter VI

Brahmo Samaj and Vedic gods – only a man of mean intelligence wants to be a guru

Amrita – Keshab's elder son – Dayananda Saraswati

Sri Ramakrishna will depart after taking some sweetmeats. Keshab's elder son comes and sits by his side.

Amrita says, "This is Keshab's eldest son. Please bless him by placing your hand on his head." "It is not given to me to bless," Sri Ramakrishna says with a smile as he gently strokes the boy's body.

Amrita (smiling) — Well, then you may stroke his body. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna talks to Amrita and other Brahmo devotees about Keshab.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Amrita and others) — It is not given to me to say of a person, 'Let him be healed.' I do not even ask the Divine Mother to grant me this power. I only ask the Divine Mother, 'Mother, pray grant me pure bhakti[1].'

"How great Keshab is – honoured alike by men of the world who seek wealth and by holy men. I once met Dayananda in the garden house. He frequently left his room, saying, 'Keshab Sen, Keshab Sen.' He was asking

[1] Sincere love unmixed with worldly desires of any kind, e.g., the weal of the body, pleasure, money, fame etc.

everybody if Keshab had come. Perhaps Keshab was expected that day.

"Dayananda used to call the Bengali language *Gauranga Bhasha* (the language of Gaur).

"I suppose he [Keshab] did not believe in the Vedic deities and the efficacy of the *homa* (sacrificial fire), so Dayananda said, 'God has made so many things, couldn't He make deities?' "

Thakur speaks highly of Keshab before his disciples.

Sri Ramakrishna — Keshab is not a man of low intelligence. Very often he has said to many [of his disciples], 'If you have any doubts, go to him [Sri Ramakrishna].' It is my way also to say, 'Let Keshab increase a million-fold.' What shall I do with fame?

"Yes, Keshab is great – honoured alike by men of the world and by holy men who seek God alone."

Sri Ramakrishna will take some sweet snacks before he leaves by cab. The Brahmo devotees accompany him to the cab.

Coming down the steps, Thakur sees that there is no light downstairs. He says to Amrita and other devotees, "All these places should be well lighted. Such an omission leads to poverty. See that such an omission does not take place again."

With two or three devotees, Thakur sets out in a cab to return to the Kali Temple.

Section XI

Sri Ramakrishna in the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar with Devotees

Chapter I

Bhakti Yoga – principle of samadhi – spiritual states of Sri Chaitanya (Mahaprabhu)

Sunday, 9 December, 1883. It is the tenth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Agrahayana (eighth month of the Hindu calendar). It is one or two o'clock in the afternoon. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room on the smaller cot talking about Lord Hari. Adhar, Manomohan, Shivachandra of Thanthania, Rakhal, M., Harish and other devotees are there. Hazra lives here these days. Thakur is describing the spiritual states of Sri Chaitanya (Mahaprabhu).

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Chaitanya Deva used to have these three states.

1. The conscious state – in this state his mind would roam between the gross and the subtle.

2. The semi-conscious state – in this state his mind was in the causal[1] state, in the enjoyment of the causal.

3. The innermost state – his mind would merge into the Great Cause[2].

"This conforms beautifully to the five sheaths (*koshas*) of the *Vedas*. The gross body is concerned with

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[1] *Karana*
[2] *Mahakarana*

the *annamaya*[1] and the *pranamaya*[2] sheaths. The subtle body means the *manomaya*[3] and the *vijnanamaya*[4] sheaths. The causal body corresponds to the *anandamaya*[5] sheath. The Great Cause is beyond the five sheaths. When the mind merges in the Great Cause, it results in what is called nirvikalpa or jada samadhi.

"When Chaitanya Deva was in the conscious state, he would chant the name of God. In the semi-conscious state, he danced with the devotees. And when he experienced the innermost state, he would be absorbed in samadhi."

M. (to himself) — Is Thakur alluding to his own states? Chaitanya Deva also experienced these states.

Sri Ramakrishna — Chaitanya was an incarnation of bhakti (love and devotion). He came to teach love of God to mankind. Have love for God and everything else is done for you. There is no need at all for Hatha Yoga.

Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga

A Certain Devotee — Sir, what is Hatha Yoga?

Sri Ramakrishna — In Hatha Yoga, one is more concerned with the body. A Hatha yogi puts a bamboo tube in his anus for washing the inner organs of the body. He draws ghee (clarified butter) and milk through his organ of reproduction. He practices exercises to

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[1] Gross physical sheath sustained by food

[2] Subtle, vital sheath consisting of five pranas: prana, apana, samana, vyana, and udana. It vitalizes and holds together the body and mind for the continuation of life; its gross manifestation is the breath.

[3] Sheath of mind which receives sense impressions

[4] Sheath of intellect which discriminates or wills

[5] Body of bliss, so-called because it is nearest to the Blissful Atman

train his tongue. He sits in a fixed posture and sometimes levitates. All these are the actions of *prana* (the vital breath). A magician, while performing magic feats, turned his tongue to touch his palate and immediately his body became stiff. People thought he was dead. He was buried and remained in a grave for many years. After a long time the grave was somehow opened and that man regained outer consciousness. As soon as he was conscious, he cried out, 'Look at my magic! See my feats!' (All laugh.) All these are actions of *prana*.

"Vedantists don't accept Hatha Yoga. Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga. In Raja Yoga one unites with God through the mind. One communes with God by means of love and reason. It is a good path of union with God. Hatha Yoga is not well-suited for the age of Kali in which life depends on food."

Chapter II

Austerities of Sri Ramakrishna – his near and dear ones – great centres of pilgrimage of future

Sri Ramakrishna is standing on the path by the Nahabat. He sees M. seated on a side verandah behind the fence and absorbed in deep meditation. Is he meditating on the Lord? Thakur is on his way back from Jhautala (willow grove) after having a wash.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well! So you are meditating here. You will soon succeed. Just practice a little and someone will appear to tell you the right way.

M. is startled when he sees Thakur. He remains seated on his *asana* (meditation seat).

Sri Ramakrishna — The time is ripe for you. The bird doesn't hatch its egg before the right hour. I have indicated your spiritual ideal (abode). It is truly your 'abode'.

Saying this, Thakur tells Mani again what his spiritual ideal (abode) is.

"It is not that everybody has to practice a lot of austerities – though I had to make a great deal of effort. I used to lie down with my head on the ground and the whole day would pass by while I wept and called out, 'Mother, Mother!' "

Mani has been coming to Thakur for the last two years or so. He has been educated in English, so Thakur sometimes calls him 'Englishman'. Mani is college-educated and he is married.

He has heard Keshab and other learned men lecture. He enjoys reading English philosophy and science. But since he has met Thakur, he has been finding the learned books of European scholars and lectures in English and other languages unattractive. Now he wishes only to see Thakur day and night and to listen to his holy conversation.

These days M. deliberates especially upon one instruction of Thakur. Thakur has said, "You can only see the Lord if you take to sadhana (spiritual disciplines)." He also has said, "Indeed, the aim of human life is God-realization."

Sri Ramakrishna — Just practice a little and someone will come to tell you the right way. You must observe the fast of *ekadashi*[1].

"You are my own, my near and dear one. Why else would you come here so often? While listening to the

[1] The eleventh day of the lunar fortnight

kirtan (devotional songs), I saw Rakhal among the cowherds of Braja. Narendra belongs to a very high spiritual ideal (abode). And Hirananda! What a childlike temperament he has! He is so sweet! I long to see him, too."

His earlier story – intimate companions of Gauranga – tulsi grove – service rendered by Mathur Babu

"I saw the intimate companions of Gauranga (Chaitanya Deva), not in bhava (ecstasy), but with my physical eyes. Formerly, I was in such a state that I had visions with my physical eyes. Now I see things in ecstasy.

"With the physical eyes I saw Gauranga and his intimate companions. I saw you, too, among them. Also Balaram.

"Why do I suddenly stand up when I see somebody? You know, it's as if I were meeting an old acquaintance after a long time.

"I used to weep and pray to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, I am dying to see the devotees! Please bring them to me quickly.' At that time whatever came to pass in my mind would happen.

"I had planted a grove of tulsi in the Panchavati for performing japa and meditation. I had the idea that it should be enclosed by a fence of bamboo canes. Later I found that a bundle of bamboo canes and a small piece of string had come floating in with the tide in front of the Panchavati. A labourer of the temple joyfully informed me about it.

"In that state I could not perform worship. I said, 'Mother, who will look after me in this state? Mother! I am not strong enough to bear my own burden. And I like to hear about You, I like to feed Your devotees. I

like to offer something to them who visit me. How is it possible, Mother? Mother, please provide a rich person to help me!' That is why Mathur Babu rendered me so much service.

"And I said, 'Mother, I shall have no child, but I want a particularly pure boy devotee to always live with me. Pray give me such a boy.' So I got Rakhal. Those who are intimate with me are either a portion of the divinity or one *kala*[1] thereof."

Thakur again goes toward the Panchavati. M. accompanies him. Thakur laughs and talks on various topics.

His earlier story – wondrous vision of the form – branch of the banana tree

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — You see, one day I saw a wondrous form extending from the Kali Temple to the Panchavati. Do you believe it?

M. is aghast. He takes a leaf or two from a branch in the Panchavati and puts them in his pocket.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you see where that branch fell off? I used to sit under it.

M. — I took a green branch from this tree and have it at my home.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Why?

M. — I am overjoyed when I see it. In the end, this spot will become a great centre of pilgrimage.

[1] One sixteenth of the power of divinity

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What kind of centre of pilgrimage? Like Panihati?

A great festival is held at Panihati to commemorate Raghava Pandit. There is a large gathering. Sri Ramakrishna attends the festival almost every year. There he dances in ecstatic love during the kirtan just as Sri Gauranga (Chaitanya Deva) did. Unable to hold himself back at the call of his devotees, he came again to reveal his image of love during the kirtan.

Chapter III

Narration of the Lord's story

It is evening. Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the smaller cot in his room meditating on the Divine Mother. Arati of the deities is being performed one after the other in the shrines. One can hear the sound of conch shells and the ringing of bells. M. is to stay here for the night.

After some time, Thakur asks M. to read the 'Bhaktamala' to him. M. reads.

The story of king Jayamal

"There was a king named Jayamal. Of pure nature, he had an ineffable love for Lord Krishna. He observed the rules of worship strictly, according to *Navadha* bhakti (devotion of nine rites). His devotion was as strong as a line drawn on rock.

"He was only happy when engaged in the worship of the Deity Shyamalasundara[1] and he knew no other gods or goddesses. At dawn he regularly sat down for four hours to worship Him.

[1] An appellation of Lord Krishna

"He would not think of anything but His worship at this time, even if there was danger to his treasury or a thunderbolt struck from above.

"Having come to know of it, a rival king invaded Jayamal's kingdom while he was engaged in worship.

"Without their king's command, the army chief and soldiers could not go to battle. They stood waiting for his orders as the enemy gradually surrounded the fort. Even so, the king was not moved.

"His mother came to him beating her forehead, and cried loudly in sorrow, 'Everything is being taken away! There is complete destruction! Yet you are so unconcerned!'

"Jayamal said, 'Mother, why do you pester me? What can one do when the Giver Himself takes back what He has given? What He protects, no one can take away. All our efforts are certainly in vain.'

"In the meantime Shyamalasundara, the Deity, armed Himself and rode the king's horse to the battlefield. He destroyed the enemy's army, then tied the horse and returned to the worship.

"His worship over, King Jayamal came out and saw his horse panting and perspiring profusely from head to foot. He asked, 'Who rode my horse? And who has tied him to the shrine?' No one knew who had ridden the horse and who had brought it back.

"Suspecting something unusual, the king warily went to the battlefield with his soldiers. There he saw enemy soldiers lying dead in the field. Only one was spared, their chief king. Surprised, he asked the king what had happened.

"The enemy king, putting a cloth around his neck[1] and offering worship to King Jayamal with folded hands, made his submission: 'What fight could we put up against your wonderful soldier? He could conquer the three worlds.'

"I don't ask for wealth, nor do I ask for a kingdom. You may take my kingdom if you will tell me who the blue-hued soldier is who destroyed my whole army. He won my heart as soon as I saw him.

"King Jayamal understood that it was all the doing of Shyam (the blue-hued One, Sri Krishna). The enemy king also understood the mystery and began to chant prayers, holding Jayamal's feet. He said, 'I take refuge at the feet of the one by whose blessing Sri Krishna has showered His grace on me. May your Shyam accept me.' "

The reading from the scripture over, Thakur talks with M.

Dogmatism in Bhaktamala – who is an intimate one? Janaka and Shukadeva

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you believe it? Do you believe that He Himself vanquished a whole army, riding a horse?

M. — The devotee called upon Him with a yearning heart. So I believe it. But whether the Lord was actually seen riding a horse, I don't know. He could have come on horseback, but I am not sure if He was actually seen.

[1] One puts a piece of cloth round one's neck to indicate humility

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — This book contains beautiful stories of devotees. But the book is dogmatic. It runs down other beliefs.

The next day Thakur is talking to M. standing on the garden path. Mani says to him, "I must come and stay here."

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, you come to me so often. What does it signify? People go to a sadhu and see him just once. What does it mean that you come here so often?

M. is silent. Thakur himself replies to his question.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Does one visit unless one is very intimate? One who is intimate is one who is very near and dear, one's very own – like father, son, brother and sister.

"I don't say everything to you at one time. If I did, why would you come again to see me?

"Shukadeva went to Janaka seeking Brahmajnana (the knowledge of Brahman). Janaka asked him first to pay his *dakshina*[1]. Shukadeva said, 'How is the teacher's fee due before the instruction is given?' Janaka laughed and said, 'When you have gained Brahmajnana, you will not be able to differentiate between the guru and the disciple. So I ask for the teacher's fee in advance!' "

[1] A fee or gift given to the teacher

Chapter IV

Reflections in the heart of the disciple

It is the bright fortnight. The moon has risen. M. is strolling on the garden path of the Kali Temple. On one side of the path are Sri Ramakrishna's room, the Nahabat, the Bakultala and the Panchavati. On the other side, the bright waters of the Bhagirathi (the holy Ganges) reflect the moonlight.

M. is talking to himself, "Can one really realize God? Sri Ramakrishna says so. He says, 'Do a little and someone will come and tell you the way.' In other words, he has asked me to practice some spiritual disciplines. Well, I have married and have children. Can one married and with children still attain Him? (Thinking for awhile) Certainly one can. Otherwise, why should he have said so? Is it not possible by His grace?"

"One sees the universe in front – sun, moon, stars, living beings and twenty-four cosmic principles. How have they come into existence? Who is their Creator? Moreover, what am I to Him? This life is in vain without this knowledge.

"Sri Ramakrishna is the best among men. I have never seen such a great, saintly person in my life. He certainly has seen the Lord. If not, to whom does he talk day and night, crying, 'Mother, Mother!' And how is it that he has so much love for the Lord – such love that he loses all outer consciousness? He goes into samadhi and becomes inert. And then sometimes he laughs, sometimes he weeps, sometimes he dances and sings, intoxicated with divine love."

Section XII

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

It is the full moon day of the month of Agrahayana[1], the Sankranti[2], Friday, 14 December, 1883, time about 9:00 a.m. Sri Ramakrishna is standing near the door of his room on the southeastern verandah. Ramlal stands nearby. Rakhal and Latu are also not far away. M. enters and salutes Thakur by touching his head to the ground.

Thakur says, "So you have come! It is a very auspicious day." M. will stay with Thakur for a few days and practice *sadhana* (spiritual disciplines). Hasn't Thakur said, "Do a little and somebody will come to tell you the way?"

Thakur had said to M., "It is not right for you to take your meals daily from the guest house. It is intended for the sadhus and the poor. You should bring your own cook here." Consequently, M. has brought a cook with him.

Where is his food to be cooked? M. drinks milk, so Thakur has asked Ramlal to arrange it with the milkman.

Ramlal is reading the *Adhyatma Ramayana* to Thakur. M. is seated beside Thakur.

"Ramachandra is returning to Ayodhya after marrying Sita. On the way he is accosted by Parashurama. Having heard that Rama has broken Shiva's bow,

[1] Eighth month of the Hindu calendar
[2] The last day of the month

Parashurama creates a great deal of trouble. Dasharatha is full of fear. Parashurama throws a bow to Rama and asks him to string it. Rama smiles, holds it with his left hand, strings it and then twangs it. Putting an arrow to the bow, he says to Parashurama, 'Tell me, where I should shoot it.' Parashurama's arrogance crumbles. Realizing that Sri Rama is the Supreme Brahman, he chants a hymn of praise to him."

> Sri Ramakrishna goes into ecstasy hearing Parashurama's hymn. Every now and then he utters, "Rama, Rama" in a sweet voice.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ramlal) — Please read the story of Guhaka, the boatman.

> When Ramachandra went to the forest to fulfill a pledge to his father, it startled Guhaka. Ramlal reads from the Bhaktamala –

"Guhaka began to shed tears and his voice cracked. Almost motionless, he gazed at Rama like a puppet.

"Slowly approaching Rama, he said, 'Please come into my house.' Rama called him a friend and embraced him. Guhaka then surrendered himself to Rama, saying:

" 'It is good that you are my friend. I surrender my body and soul at your feet. You are my soul, my wealth, my kingdom, my love, my liberation and all meritorious deeds. I am dying of love for you. I dedicate myself at your feet.'

"Ramachandra is to spend fourteen years in the forest with matted hair and wearing the bark of trees for clothes. Hearing this, Guhaka matted his own hair and put on a cloth of bark; he ate nothing but fruits and root vegetables. After fourteen years, when Rama did

not return from exile, Guhaka was preparing his own funeral pyre when Hanuman came and told him that Rama was coming. At Hanuman's words, Guhaka was overjoyed. Soon Ramachandra and Sita arrived by the Pushpaka[1] chariot.

"Ramachandra, the compassionate, the source of supreme joy, the gracious loving Lord of the devotees and the mine of all virtues, embraced his great and dear devotee, Guhaka, who was thrilled with joy. The Lord and the servant remained in deep embrace while tears drenched their bodies. Blessed you are, Guhaka! There was the chant of '*jai*, *jai*' (victory, victory) from the heavenly abode."

Keshab Sen content with what comes to him without effort – the way – deep dispassion and renunciation of worldly life

Sri Ramakrishna is resting awhile after his meal. M. is seated nearby. Soon Dr. Shyam and some other people arrive.

Sri Ramakrishna sits up and begins to talk.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is not that one must always work. When God is realized, there is no duty to perform. When the fruit appears, the flower falls off by itself.

"There is no obligatory worship like *sandhya*[2] for him who has realized God. Sandhya ends in the Gayatri[3]. The recitation of the Gayatri is enough.

[1] It is the chariot of Kubera which can fly through air at great speed

[2] Worship and meditation performed at dawn, noon, and sunset by orthodox Hindus

[3] A Vedic mantra (sacred text) which brahmins and other twice-born Hindus repeat everyday while meditating on the Supreme Being. "May we meditate on the effulgent Light of Him who is worshipful and who

Gayatri ends in Omkar[1]. You don't even have to chant the Gayatri mantra – just repeating Om is enough. How long are there such duties as sandhya? As long as, at the name of Hari or Rama, hair of the body does not stand on end, or tears of joy flow. It is not right to worship for the sake of wealth, or for winning a lawsuit."

A Particular Devotee — Everybody is trying to earn money. I see it. Hasn't Keshab Sen given away his daughter in marriage to a prince?

Sri Ramakrishna — It is different with Keshab. To a true devotee, the Lord provides everything without any effort on his part. The real son of a king gets a monthly allowance automatically. I am not talking of pleaders and advocates who earn money by becoming slaves to others and working so hard. I say, 'One should be the real son of the king.' He who has no desire, who never asks for money, gets it automatically. The *Gita* says: 'That which comes without effort[2].'

"The real brahmin is he who has no desire – he accepts food even from a *dome*[3]. He does not ask for anything. Everything comes to him by itself."

A Particular Devotee — Sir, how should a householder lead his life?

Sri Ramakrishna — He must live like a mudfish. He must develop love for the Lord by meditating on Him in a solitary place away from home. He can then live with

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has given birth to all worlds. May He direct the rays of our intelligence toward the path of good."

[1] The Vedic symbol for the Supreme Being

[2] Gita 4:22

[3] A caste of Hindus whose duty is to cremate the dead

his family without attachment to it. He lives in the mud but does not allow it to soil his body. Such a person leads a life of nonattachment in the world.

Sri Ramakrishna notices that Mani is all attention to his words.

Sri Ramakrishna (casting a glance at Mani) — One can realize the Lord when one has developed deep dispassion (*vairagya*). He who develops it feels that the world is a forest on fire – it is ever burning! He looks at his wife and son as a death well. When one has such dispassion, one leaves one's home. But living with nonattachment alone is not enough. 'Lust and greed' constitute maya (illusion). If you recognize maya it will take flight, ashamed of itself. A person covered himself with a tiger skin to frighten others. He whom he was trying to frighten said, 'I have recognized who you are! You are our own 'Hare'.' The man in the tiger skin laughed and went away to frighten somebody else.

"All women are forms of Shakti (Divine Energy). It is the Adyashakti (Primeval Power) that has become woman and appears to us in the form of women. The *Adhyatma* (*Ramayana*) says: Narada and other saints sang the praises of Rama, saying, 'Oh Rama, you are the forms of all men and all the forms of women are the manifestations of Sita. You are Indra, Sita is Indrani; You are Shiva, Sita is Shivani; You are an aspect of man and Sita of woman!' What more can I say? Where there is a male, you are that and where there is a female, it is Sita."

Renunciation and *prarabdha*[1] – Sri Ramakrishna prohibits *vamachara*[2]

(To the devotees) "One cannot renounce by a mere wish. One has to consider the *prarabdha* and the *samskaras* (tendencies of past life). A yogi said to a king, 'Please come sit with me and meditate on Bhagavan.' The king said, 'Master, I will not be able to do so for long. I still have some desire for sense enjoyments. If I stay in this forest, I might even create a kingdom here. I still have the desire for sense enjoyments.'

"When he was a boy, Natabar Panja used to graze cattle in this garden. But he had great desire for sense enjoyments. That is why he established a castor mill and is earning a lot of money from it. He does a lot of trading in castor oil in Alambazar.

"According to one sect, spiritual disciplines must be practiced in the company of women. I was taken to a group of women by people of the Kartabhaja sect. All the women came and sat near me. When I addressed them as mother, they said to each other, 'Oh, he is only a beginner – he doesn't yet know the 'ghat' (the way).' In their sect he who is unripe is a beginner. Then he becomes an aspirant and lastly *siddha* of the *siddhas* (supremely perfect).

"A woman approached Vaishnavcharan and sat near him. When asked, Vaishnavcharan said, 'She has the attitude of a child.'

"One easily experiences a downfall by thinking of a woman as one's wife. Taking her as the Mother is a pure attitude."

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[1] Karma which is stored up and begun to bear fruit

[2] Religious practice, prescribed in the Tantra, to be performed by a man in collaboration with a woman.

The devotees from Jhansa Ripade rise, saying, "We take our leave. We will see and pay homage to Mother Kali and the gods."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and idol worship – yearning and God realization

Mani is strolling alone in the Panchavati and other areas of the Kali Temple. Thakur has said, "By practicing a little spiritual disciplines, one can realize God." Is Mani thinking about that? And about deep dispassion? And that maya takes to its wings when she is recognized?

It is about half past three. Mani is again sitting in Sri Ramakrishna's room. A teacher from the Broughton Institution has brought some students to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur is talking with them. The teacher asks a question every now and then. The topic of conversation is idol worship.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the teacher) — What is wrong with idol worship? The Vedanta holds that wherever there are 'existence, light and love,' God manifests. Thus, there is nothing but God in all the objects we see.

"Just see how long little girls play with dolls. Till they get married and live with their husbands. When they get married, they put away their dolls and other toys in a wicker basket. When you have attained God, what is the use of worshipping the idol?"

He looks at Mani and says –

"One attains God when one develops intense love for Him. A lot of yearning is necessary. When one has great yearning, the whole mind goes to Him."

Childlike faith and God-realization – Govinda, the husband – the boy Jatila

"There was a girl who became a widow at a very early age. She had never seen her husband's face. Seeing the husbands of other girls, she asked her father one day, 'Father, where is my husband?' Her father replied, 'Govinda is your husband. If you call Him, you will see Him.' Hearing this, the girl went into her room and, shutting the door, she began to cry and call out, 'Govinda! Please come. Let me see you. Why don't you come?' Hearing the cries of the little girl, Bhagavan could not hold Himself back – He appeared before the girl.

"A childlike faith is needed! Such as the yearning of a child to see its mother. Such longing heralds the dawn. It is followed by sunrise. One sees the Lord after such intense longing.

"Listen to the story of the boy Jatila. To get to school, he had to go on horseback through a forest. On the way, he would feel frightened. When he told his mother about it, she said: Why fear? You should call out, 'Madhusudana.' The boy asked, 'Who is Madhusudana?' The mother replied, 'Madhusudana is your elder brother.' After that, when he felt afraid going through the forest alone, he cried out, 'Brother Madhusudana.' When there was no reply, he called out, 'Where are you, brother Madhusudana? Please come, I am so afraid!' Bhagavan then could not hold Himself back. He came and said, 'Here I am. What is there to fear?' And he accompanied the boy to the passage leading to the school and said to Jatila, 'I will come whenever you call Me. Don't be afraid.' Such childlike faith! Such yearning!

"A brahmin used to worship Bhagavan daily in his house. One day he had to go out on business. Before

going he said to his young son, 'Offer food to Bhagavan today. The deity must be fed.' The boy did so. But Bhagavan sat still – He would neither talk nor eat. Having waited for some time, the boy saw that Bhagavan did not move. He was very sure that He would come, take his seat on his *asana,* and eat his meal. The boy said again and again, 'Bhagavan, please come and eat. It is already very late. I cannot be here much longer.' Bhagavan, however, did not say anything. The boy began to cry, saying, 'Lord, my father asked me to feed you. Why don't you come? Why don't you eat here?' He cried yearningly for some time. Then he saw Bhagavan come smiling to take His *asana* (seat) and eat the meal. After serving Him, the boy went out of the shrine. The members of his family said, 'You have fed the Lord. Bring the offered food downstairs.' The boy said, 'Yes, yes. I have fed Him and Bhagavan has eaten everything.' They said, 'What are you saying?' The boy said simply, 'Why, Bhagavan has eaten the food!' They all went to the shrine and were speechless with wonder!"

> It will be a long time till evening. Sri Ramakrishna stands on the southern side of the Nahabat and talks to Mani. The Ganga flows in front of them. It is winter, so Thakur is wearing a shawl.

Sri Ramakrishna — Will you sleep in the room in the Panchavati?

Mani — Won't they give me the upper floor room of the Nahabat?

> Sri Ramakrishna will talk to the manager about Mani. He will indicate a room for him. Mani has liked the room on the upper floor of the Nahabat. He is poetic by temperament. By staying there, he will be

able to enjoy the view of the sky, the Ganges, the moonlight, the flowering trees and so forth.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why wouldn't they assign the room to you? I suggested the room in the Panchavati because so much repetition of Hari's name and meditation have been practiced there.

Chapter III

To love the Lord is the end of life

Incense has been burnt in Sri Ramakrishna's room. Thakur is seated on the smaller cot and meditating. Mani is seated on the floor. Rakhal, Latu and Ramlal are also in the room.

Thakur says to Mani, "The main thing is to develop bhakti for God, to love Him." He asks Ramlal to sing. He sings in a sweet voice. Thakur sings the initial words of every song, letting him sing the rest.

As asked by Thakur, Ramlal sings 'the sannyasa of Gauranga.'

What an exquisite bright form of Sri Gauranga – his eyes streaming with the tears of love – have I seen in Keshab Bharati's hut!

Gauranga is dancing mad like an elephant. He sings and then rolls on the dust, tears streaming from his eyes.

He calls on Hari, weeping, piercing the mortal world and heaven with his thundering voice.

Then he repeatedly prays for liberation of the slave, with a straw under his teeth and his two palms joined together.

He wears the robe of a yogi after having his locks of hair shaved.

One cries with one's heart seeing him so surged with bhakti and *prema* (ecstatic love).

Having renounced all, he has come to distribute *prema*, overwhelmed as he is by the sorrows of mankind.

Premdas wishes to wander from door to door like a slave at the feet of Sri Chaitanya.

Ramlal sings again: Sachi weeps and says, "Nimai! How can I live without you?" Thakur says, "Please sing that song."

1. I am not hesitant to grant liberation. I hesitate to grant pure bhakti... [See Section V for complete song.]

2. Can everybody have the vision of Radha? Can one have the love she had?

It is extremely rare indeed. No adoration, no sadhana – how can one attain the treasure?

Unique are the raindrops that fall on the new moon of the month during the Libra zodiac sign in *swati nakshatra*[1]. Does it rain like that at any other time?

Thakur again says to Ramlal, "Please sing that song: Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers…" Thakur adds lines to the song along with Ramlal.

O Lord, Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers are so full of compassion.

I went to Kashi but Vishveshvara told me that I had come to Sachi Devi's house in Nadia. O Lord, I have recognized you.

I have been to several places. But nowhere have I seen a compassionate one like you.

You were Kanai and Balai in Braja. Now hiding these forms you are Gaur and Nitai in Nadia.

[1] A particular conjunction of stars

In Braja you played hide and seek; in Nadia your sport is to roll in the dust uttering, 'Hari, Hari,' intoxicated with love.

Your sport in Braja was full of action. In Nadia it is only repeating the name of Hari.

O Gauranga, the compassionate one, the whole of your body is covered. Only your two slanting eyes have been spared.

O the saviour of the fallen, hearing your redeeming name, I feel so assured in my mind.

I have reached you with great hopes. O the compassionate one, Lord Gauranga, give me shelter under your feet.

Jagai and Madhai have been liberated. O Lord, the redeemer of the holy, I need your assurance.

You even raise the *chandala* up in your arms and utter *Haribol*[1] to him with so much compassion, you Lord of the indigent.

Sri Ramakrishna's devotees practice sadhana in solitude

Mani is alone in the upper story room of the Nahabat. It is quite late at night. Today is the full moon day of Agrahayana. The sky, the Ganges, the Kali Temple, the spires of the shrine, the garden paths and the Panchavati seem to be swimming in moonlight. Mani, all alone, is meditating on Sri Ramakrishna.

At about 3:00 a.m. he rises. He goes toward the Panchavati to the north. Sri Ramakrishna has talked to him about the Panchavati. Mani doesn't like to stay in the Nahabat anymore. He has made up his mind to live in the Panchavati room.

Stillness reigns everywhere. There was a flood tide of the river at 11:00 p.m. He had heard the

[1] To chant the name of Lord Hari

repeated sound of the tide. Now he proceeds toward the Panchavati. He hears a sound from far off, as if somebody is wailing from the Panchavati grove in pain, "Where are you, brother Madhusudana?"

It is full moon. The rays of the moon stream down through the branches of the banana trees.

He proceeds further and sees from a distance that one of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees is seated in the middle of the Panchavati. It is he who has been calling aloud from that solitary spot, "Where are you, brother Madhusudana?" Mani watches him silently.

Section XIII

Sri Ramakrishna with Prankrishna, M. and other Devotees at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Prankrishna, M., Ram, Girindra and Gopal with Sri Ramakrishna

It is 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, 5 April, 1884, the twenty-fourth day of Chaitra. M. comes to the Dakshineswar Temple and sees Sri Ramakrishna sitting on the smaller cot in his room, smiling. A number of devotees, including Prankrishna Mukherji, are sitting on the floor.

Prankrishna is from the aristocratic Mukherji family of Janai. His home is in Shyampukur in Calcutta. He is the head of the auction house of McKenzie Lyal known as the Exchange. Though a householder, he is very interested in discussions of the Vedanta. He is devoted to the Paramahamsa Deva [Sri Ramakrishna] and often comes to see him. One day he took Sri Ramakrishna to his house and held a celebration in honour of his coming. He takes his daily morning bath at the Baghbazar ghat and when a boat is available, he goes directly to Dakshineswar to see Thakur. Today, too, he hired a boat. Hardly had it left the bank when the river became choppy. M. asked Prankrishna to let him off the boat. In spite of assurances of safety from Prankrishna and his friends, M. insisted. He said, "You must put me on land. I shall go to Dakshineswar on foot." Prankrishna had to let him go.

Reaching Dakshineswar, M. finds Prankrishna and the others talking with Thakur on spiritual matters. They had arrived a few moments before M. He salutes Thakur by touching his head on the floor and takes his seat.

Humanity and divinity of incarnation

Sri Ramakrishna (to Prankrishna) — But He is manifest more in the human being. If you say, 'How can one who is subject to hunger, thirst and other human needs, and who may be suffering from disease or sorrow, be an avatar,' the reply is, 'Even Brahman laments when bound by the five elements.'

"You see, Ramachandra wept in his suffering at Sita's pangs of separation. And once He Incarnated Himself as a sow to kill Hiranyaksha (the demon). When Hiranyaksha had been killed, Narayana still did not want to go back to heaven. He stayed in the body of the sow and had a big litter. He was very happy living with the young ones. The gods exclaimed, 'What does it mean? Bhagavan doesn't want to return.' So they all went to Shiva and humbly told him the situation. Shiva went to the sow and tried to persuade it to return, but it began to suckle its young ones. (Everybody laughs.) Then Shiva pierced the sow's body with his trident. Narayana came out, laughing merrily, and went back to heaven."

Prankrishna (to Thakur) — Sir, what is the *Anahata Shabda*?

Sri Ramakrishna — The *Anahata Shabda* goes on continuously by itself – it is the sound of Om. It originates in the Supreme Brahman. Only yogis can hear it, not those who are attached to the sense world. Yogis know that this sound rises from the navel and

that it also originates in the Supreme Brahman, resting on the Ocean of Milk[1].

Keshab Sen's question about the afterlife

Prankrishna — Sir, what is the afterlife like?

Sri Ramakrishna — Keshab Sen asked the same question. As long as a man lives in ignorance – in other words, as long as he doesn't realize the Lord – he has to be born in this world. But when he has attained jnana, he does not have to come to the world any longer, to the earth or to any other world.

"The potter puts his pots out to dry in the sun. You must have noticed that some of the pots dry hard and others do not. When a cow or some other animal happens to walk over them, some of them break. If a hard pot breaks, the potter throws it away, for it is of no use. But when a soft one breaks, he collects its clay and again puts it on the wheel to make another pot. It means that until one has realized God, one has to go back into the hands of the 'potter.' In other words, one has to repeatedly return to this world.

"What is the use of sowing boiled paddy seed? It can never sprout into a plant. When a man has been baked (perfected) in the fire of jnana, he is not used for new creation – he attains salvation."

Vedanta and ego – Vedanta and 'awareness of a witness' – jnana and vijnana

"According to the *Puranas*, the devotee is one entity and Bhagavan is another. I and you are separate entities. The body is only a small earthen bowl. Inside the body

[1] According to Hindu mythology, the Lord rests on the Ocean of Milk (ocean of Great Cause) after the end of each creation

there is the mind, the intellect and the water of ego. Brahman is like the sun. He is reflected in the water. Thus the devotee sees the form of the Lord.

"In the Vedanta, only Brahman is real; all else is maya, like a dream, a nonentity. The stick of I-ness lies on the ocean of Sachchidananda. (To M.) Listen to this carefully. If you take out this stick of ego, there remains only one ocean of Sachchidananda. But as long as there is the stick of ego in it, it looks split into two – one part of the water here, and the other part there. When one attains the knowledge of Brahman one goes into samadhi. Then this I-ness vanishes.

"For this reason, Shankaracharya preserved his 'I of knowledge' – to teach mankind.

(To Prankrishna) "But a jnani (man of spiritual knowledge) has certain characteristics. One may think that he has attained jnana, but what are the signs? He cannot harm anybody, he becomes childlike. When the philosopher's stone touches a steel sword, its steel turns into gold. This gold cannot injure. Outwardly you may see anger and egoism in him, but in reality the jnani has none.

"From a distance a burnt piece of rope still looks like a rope. But if you go near it and blow on it, it blows away. There is only a semblance of anger and egoism in a jnani. In reality there is no anger, or egoism.

"The child has no attachment. It makes a doll house and if anybody touches it, it begins to cry loudly, jumping around in protest. Later, it breaks the doll house itself. Sometimes it obstinately says, 'My father gave this cloth to me; I won't give it to you.' And next it forgets about the cloth when given a doll to play with; it leaves the cloth behind and goes away.

"All these are the signs of a jnani. Perhaps he is very rich – he has big pictures in his house, a horse

driven carriage and so on. But he leaves all this behind and goes to Kashi[1].

"According to Vedanta, even the state of waking is not of any significance. A woodcutter was dreaming when somebody woke him up. Irritated, he cried out, 'Why have you disturbed my sleep? I was a king and father of seven boys. The boys had already been educated and trained in weaponry. I was on my throne, ruling my kingdom. Why did you destroy my world of happiness?' The man said, 'But it was a dream, what does it matter?' The woodcutter said, 'Go on! You don't understand. To be a king in a dream is as true for me as to be a woodcutter. If it is true to be a woodcutter, then it is also true to be a king in a dream.' "

> Prankrishna is always talking about jnana. That must be why Thakur is telling him about the state of a jnani. Now he talks of the state of a vijnani. Is he hinting at his own state?

Sri Ramakrishna — Reaching the Atman through the path of 'neti, neti' (not this, not this) is jnana. By reasoning 'neti, neti,' one goes into samadhi and attains the Atman.

"What is vijnana? You must know God in a special way. One person has heard of milk, another has seen it, and yet another has drunk it. He who has only heard of milk is an ajnani (a man of ignorance), he who has seen it is a jnani (a man of spiritual knowledge), and he who has drunk it has attained vijnana. That is to say, he has known God in a special way. When one sees the Lord and talks to Him as a near and dear one, it is *vijnana*.

"Initially one must start discriminating 'neti, neti'. God is not the five vital elements[1], nor the senses. He is

[1] Benares; a holy place of the Hindus

neither the mind, nor the intellect nor the ego. He is beyond all cosmic principles. If you are to climb a roof, you have to leave the steps behind one by one. The steps are not the roof. But when you have reached the roof, you perceive that the steps are made of the same material as the roof, namely bricks, lime and brick-dust. He who is the Supreme Brahman has become the universe and all its living beings. He has also become the twenty-four cosmic principles. That which is Atman has become the five vital elements. Then why is the earth so hard if it is made out of the Atman? All is possible by His will. Flesh and bones have resulted from blood and semen. How hard is sea foam!"

Can a householder attain vijnana? He needs to perform sadhana

"When one has attained vijnana, one may live in the family. Then one realizes very well that God has become the universe and its living beings, that He is not outside the world. When Ramachandra attained jnana, he said, 'I shall not live in the household.' Thereupon Dasharatha sent Vaishishtha to explain it to him. Vaishishtha said, 'Rama! If there is no Lord in the household, you may renounce it.' Rama was silent at this. He knew very well that there is nothing without the Lord. So he did not renounce the world. (To Prankrishna) The main thing is that you need the divine sight. You develop this sight when your mind becomes pure. Just consider the Kumari Puja (Thakur's worship of an unmarried girl). This girl had excreta and urine inside her body. But I saw her as the very manifestation of Bhagavati. Take the case of the wife and son. A man loves both of them, but each with a different attitude. So it is said that it all depends on one's mind. The attitude of the pure mind is very

[1] Namely earth, water, fire, air and ether

different from the impure. It is this pure mind with which one sees the Lord in the household. You need to practice sadhana (spiritual disciplines) for it.

"Practice of spiritual disciplines is needed. One has to know that one gets easily bound when one has physical relations with one's wife. A woman naturally loves her husband, just as a man loves his wife. That is how both of them quickly fall spiritually.

"But there is a great advantage to family life. One may have physical relations with the wife when it is especially needed. (Smiling) Why are you laughing, M.?"

M. (to himself) — Since householders cannot renounce fully, all at once, Thakur is allowing this much. Isn't one-hundred percent brahmacharya (celibacy) totally impossible while living in the family?

A Hatha Yogi (practitioner of Hatha Yoga) enters.

A Hatha Yogi has been living in the Panchavati for the last few days. He takes only milk and opium, and practices Hatha Yoga. He doesn't eat rice and lentils. However, he hasn't enough money for the milk and opium. When Thakur went to the Panchavati, he had a word with the Hatha Yogi. The Hatha Yogi said to Rakhal, "Please request the Paramahamsa to arrange it for me." Thakur sent the message that he would see if the gentlemen from Calcutta would help when they visit him.

The Hatha Yogi (to Sri Ramakrishna) — What did you say to Rakhal?

Sri Ramakrishna — I told him that I would find out if any gentleman was willing to give some money. But nobody did. (To Prankrishna) It seems you don't like these people.

Prankrishna doesn't reply.

The Hatha Yogi leaves.

Thakur resumes the conversation.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and telling the truth – believe in God's sport as a human being

Sri Ramakrishna (to Prankrishna and other devotees) — Besides, you must always be firm in telling the truth while leading a household life. You can, indeed, realize Bhagavan simply by being truthful. I am not so firm about telling the truth now as I used to be. Before, if I once said that I would take a bath, I would begin to doubt whether I had taken a full bath, even when I had stepped into the Ganges, recited the sacred words, and poured a little water on my head. If I said that I would go to a particular spot to ease myself, I would go only there. I went to Ram's house in Calcutta and happened to say that I would not eat *luchi* (fried bread). When I was given food, I was very hungry. But since I had said that I would not take luchis, I just filled my stomach with sweetmeats. (All laugh.)

"Now I am not so particular about speaking the truth. Once I happened to say that I would go to ease myself, but felt no special need for it. What was I to do? I asked Ram[1]. He said, 'You need not go.' Then I reasoned, 'All is Narayana, Ram is Narayana too. Why should I not accept his word?' The elephant may be Narayana, but so is the mahout. When the mahout is asking me not to go near the elephant, then why should I not obey him? Thinking this way, I am now less strict about being truthful."

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[1] Ram Chatterji, the attendant of Sri Radhakanta in the temple

His earlier story: Vaishnavcharan's instruction – believe in God's sport as a human being

"Now I find that I am undergoing a change. Many days ago Vaishnavcharan said that one attains *purna* (ultimate) jnana only when one sees God in man. Now I see that it is He who is moving about in all the different forms. Now He is in the form of a sadhu, now a deceitful person, and now a rascal. So I say, 'Narayana in the form of a sadhu, Narayana as a deceitful person, Narayana as a rascal, and Narayana as a wicked person.'

"Now I ask myself, how can I feed everybody? I have the desire to feed everyone. So I make a person stay here and I feed him."

Prankrishna (looking at M. and laughing) — He is a good man. (To Sri Ramakrishna) Sir, he forced us to land him from the boat.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — What happened?

Prankrishna — He was on the boat. Seeing a few waves on the river, he said, 'Let me land.' (To M.) How did you get here?

M. (laughing) — On foot.

Sri Ramakrishna begins to laugh.

Difficult for the householders to give up worldly work – the pundit and practice of discrimination

Prankrishna (to Ramakrishna) — Sir, I am thinking about giving up work. When one is busy at work, one can think of nothing else. (Pointing at a gentleman companion) I am training him in my job. When I give it

up, he will attend to it. I feel that I can't engage in work any longer.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, it is very troublesome. It will be very nice if you can take to contemplation of God now. But though you say so, will you be able to give it up? Captain also said the same. Householders say so, but they cannot do it.

"So many pundits talk of jnana. They only talk of it, but they don't put their words into practice. They are like vultures that soar high but their gaze remains fixed on the charnel pits. In other words, they remain attached to 'lust and gold,' to the world. When I hear of a pundit having discrimination[1] and nonattachment[2], I am in awe of him. Otherwise, they are like dogs and goats to me."

Prankrishna salutes Thakur and prepares to leave. He asks M whether he will accompany him. M replies, "No, you go ahead." Prankrishna laughs and says, "And you must also leave!" (All laugh.)

M. strolls near the Panchavati and then takes his bath at the ghat where Sri Ramakrishna usually bathes. Then he goes for the darshan[3] of Bhavatarini and Radhakanta and offers his obeisance. He says to himself, "I was told that the Lord is formless. Why, then, am I paying obeisance to deities? Sri Ramakrishna believes in gods and goddesses with form. Is that the reason I am doing this? I know nothing about the Lord, nor do I understand. When Thakur believes in them, I, an insignificant fellow, should also have faith."

M. is having the darshan of Bhavatarini. He sees that She has a human head and a sword in Her

[1] *Viveka*
[2] *Vairagya*
[3] Act of seeing in order to pay homage

two left hands. With Her two right hands She is granting assurance and fearlessness. On the one hand, She is so terrible, and on the other, the gracious and loving Mother of the devotees – the meeting point of both attitudes. The Mother, compassionate to the lowly, to the devotee, so affectionate! But it is also true that the Mother is terrible, the picture of death! Why two opposite attitudes in one person? Only She knows.

It is Thakur's explanation that is coming to M.'s mind and he is thinking about it. It is said that Keshab Sen accepted Mother Kali in Thakur's presence. Keshab would say, "Is this the Goddess who was Spirit and Consciousness manifesting Herself in a clay image?"

Sri Ramakrishna, the man in samadhi, is conscious of pots and pans

Now M. comes and sits close to Sri Ramakrishna. Seeing that he has taken his bath, Thakur gives him prasad of fruits and so forth. M. takes them to the semi-circular verandah. He leaves the brass pot of drinking water on the verandah and quickly comes in to sit close to Thakur again. Thakur says, "Did you bring the brass pot?"

M. — Sir, I'll bring it immediately.

Sri Ramakrishna — Bah!

M. is embarrassed. He goes to the verandah and brings the brass pot into the room.

M.'s home is in Calcutta but, because of family problems, he lives in a rented house in Shyampukur. His place of work is nearby. His father, brothers and others live in the paternal house. Thakur wants him to live in his parental house because it is more convenient to meditate on the Lord in a joint family.

Though Thakur has been saying this off and on, unfortunately M. has not returned to his parental house. Thakur raises this topic again today.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, are you going back home now?

M. — I am not the least inclined to go there.

Sri Ramakrishna — But, why? Your father has renovated the whole house.

M. — I have suffered so many troubles in that house. There is no way that I can go there.

Sri Ramakrishna — Who are you afraid of?

M. — Everyone!

Sri Ramakrishna (gravely) — This fear is as unsubstantial as being afraid of the boat!

The deities have been offered holy food. Arati is being performed as the cymbals and bells ring. The Kali Temple is filled with joy. Hearing the sound of arati the indigent, sadhus and fakirs all run toward the guest house. Some of them have a sal leaf plate and the others, a metal plate and a drinking pot. They all partake of the prasad (sacramental food). Today M., too, takes the prasad of Mother Bhavatarini (Kali).

Chapter III

Keshab Chandra Sen and the Navavidhan – the Navavidhan has some substance

Thakur is resting after his meal. In the meantime Ram, Girindra and many other devotees arrive. They

offer him salutation by touching their heads on the floor, and then they take their seats.

The topic of conversation turns to Keshab Chandra Sen's Navavidhan.

Ram (to Sri Ramakrishna) — Sir, it doesn't seem to me that the Navavidhan has done much good. If Keshab Babu had been genuine, why would his devotees come to their present plight? According to me, there is no substance in him. It is like sounding some broken pieces of earthenware and then locking the door – people would think that there is a lot of money inside. But actually there are only broken pieces of baked clay. Outsiders don't know what is inside.

Sri Ramakrishna — There is definitely some substance in him. If not, why would so many people honour him? Why don't people see the greatness of Shivanath? Unless the Lord wills, greatness is not honoured.

"Yet, unless a person renounces the world, he can accomplish nothing wonderful and people do not accept him. People say, 'He is a householder, he enjoys 'lust and gold' secretly while he tells us that the Lord is the only Reality and the world is transitory like a dream.' Unless one has renounced the world completely, his word is not accepted by everybody, even though some worldly people may accept it. Keshab lived a householder life, so he was also interested in his family. Worldly people have to be protected. He lectured a great deal, but he also made full provision for his household. What a son-in-law he had! I entered his house and saw big cots! When you live a householder's life, such luxuries come automatically. What is the world if not a place for sense enjoyment?"

Ram — Keshab got those cots when his ancestor's property was divided. It was his share. Sir, you may say anything, but Vijay Babu told me that Keshab Sen said to him, 'I am a portion of Christ, of Gauranga (Chaitanya Deva). And you should say that you are Advaita.' And do you know what he said? That you also belong to the Navavidhan. (Thakur and others laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — I don't know, brother. I don't even know the meaning of Navavidhan! (All laugh.)

Ram — Keshab's disciples say that he has harmonized jnana and bhakti.

Sri Ramakrishna (surprised) — How is that, brother? Then what does the *Adhyatma* (*Ramayana*) contain? Narada began to sing a hymn of praise to Ramachandra, 'O Rama! You are the same Supreme Brahman that the *Vedas* talk of. You have been living with us as a human being and, though you look like a man, in reality you are not a human being. You are that Supreme Brahman.' Ramachandra said, 'Narada, I am extremely pleased with you. Please ask for a boon.' Narada said, 'Rama, what boon can I ask? Grant that I may have pure bhakti for your lotus feet. And may you not enchant me with your world-bewitching maya.' The *Adhyatma* (*Ramayana*) contains only jnana and bhakti.

> Now the conversation turns on Amrita, a disciple of Keshab.

Ram — Amrita Babu has become quite a different person.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, I saw him rather sick the other day.

Ram — Sir, let me tell you about his lecture. The moment the drum is sounded, they all say, 'Victory to Keshab.' Didn't you say that 'dal[1]' is formed in small shallow pits of stagnant water? One day Amrita Babu said in his lecture, 'The holy man [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] says that sects are formed in small pits. But brother, one needs the sects, one definitely needs them. I tell you the truth: they are indeed needed.' (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna — What is this? Shame! Shame! Shame! What a lecture!

> Now the topic of discussion is that some people like to praise their leader.

Sri Ramakrishna — The musical play of Nimai Sannyasa (the renunciation of Sri Chaitanya) was to be enacted at Keshab's house. I was invited to it. That day I heard somebody call Keshab and Pratap 'Gaur and Nitai'. Prasanna then asked me what I was. I noticed that Keshab was looking at me to see what I would reply. I replied, 'I am the servant of the servants of your servant, I am the dust of dust.' Keshab laughed and said, 'He can never be caught.'

Ram — Keshab sometimes used to say that you were John the Baptist.

A Devotee — And sometimes he would say that you are the Chaitanya Deva of the nineteenth century.

Sri Ramakrishna — What does that mean?

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[1] The word has two meanings: 'sedge' and 'sect'

The Devotee — It means that Chaitanya Deva has incarnated again in the nineteenth century. And you are he.

Sri Ramakrishna (indifferently) — Leave it alone. But tell me now how my hand[1] can be set right. My only care now is to see that my hand is cured.

The topic turns to Trailokya's songs. Trailokya sings the name of the Lord and devotional songs in Keshab's Samaj (society).

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah, how beautifully Trailokya sings!

Ram — How? Are all his songs all right?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, all right. Otherwise, why do his songs attract my mind so much?

Ram — He has composed all the songs in the *bhava* (attitude) he has borrowed from you. Keshab Sen used to describe these very attitudes at the time of performing worship. Trailokya Babu would then compose songs in the same mood. Just take this song –

It is a fair of joy in the mart of love.

How Hari is sporting merrily with the devotees!

"You enjoy yourself in the company of devotees. Noticing this, he has composed all his songs in the same mood."

[1] Some days ago Sri Ramakrishna fell down and broke his hand. A bandage was tied around his hand for several days. The hand is bandaged even now.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Please don't torment me anymore. Why do you want to involve me in that? (Laughter.)

Girindra — The Brahmo devotees say that the Paramahamsa Deva lacks the faculty of organization.

Sri Ramakrishna — What does that mean?

M. — That you don't know how to form and run an organization. That you are not intelligent enough. That's what they say. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ram) — Now please tell me why my hand broke? Please stand up and lecture on this topic. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna instructs the Brahmos, the Vaishnavas and the Shaktas on sectarianism

"The Brahmos insist that God is formless. Let them say so. It is enough to call on Him sincerely. If you are sincere, He, being *antaryami*[1], will surely make you know, make you understand, what His real nature is.

"Yet it is not good to say that only what you know of Him is right and others are wrong. That since we take Him as formless, He is formless and can't have form. Or that He has a form and so cannot be formless. Can a man reach the end of God?

"In the same way, the Vaishnavas and Shaktas are opposed to each other. The Vaishnavas say, 'He is our Keshab [Sri Krishna].' The Shaktas say, 'He is our Bhagavati, the only giver of liberation.'

[1] God as the Inner Controller

'I took Vaishnavcharan to Mathur Babu. Vaishnavcharan is a man of discrimination and great learning. But he is a rigid Vaishnava. On the other hand, Mathur Babu is a devotee of Bhagavati. They were having a nice conversation when Vaishnavcharan said, 'Only Keshab [Krishna] grants liberation.' No sooner did Mathur Babu hear these words than his face flushed with anger. He said, 'My foot!' (All laugh.) Was he [Mathur] not a Shakta (worshipper of Shakti)? It was natural for him to react that way. In the meantime I tried to distract Vaishnavcharan by stroking his body.

"I see that all those who harp on religion are actually quarrelling among themselves. The Hindus, the Mohammedans, the Brahmos, the Shaktas, the Vaishnavas, the Shaivites are all quarreling with each other. They haven't gained the intelligence to understand that He who is called Krishna is Shiva, and also the Primeval Power. He is the same Being who is known as Christ or Allah. There is but one Rama, and He is known by a thousand names.

"There is one Substance; it is called by different names. Everybody is asking for the same one Substance. Yet there is a difference of place, person and name. A pond has a number of ghats. The Hindus draw water from one ghat and, filling their brass pots, they call it *jal*. The Mohammedans take water from the other ghat and, filling their skin bags, they call it *pani*. While the Christians take water from a third ghat and call it water. (All laugh.)

"When a person says that this substance is not *jal* but *pani,* or it is not *pani* but water, or not water but *jal*, it becomes ridiculous. That is the reason why there are different groups, ill will and quarrels. Resorting to fights with staves, and scuffling and killing in the name of religion is not good. Everybody is going toward God.

When one is sincere and yearns for Him, one attains Him.

(To Mani) "Listen to this. The *Vedas*, the *Puranas*, the *Tantras*, all these religious texts seek Him alone and none else. Whom the *Vedas* call Sachchidananda Brahman, the *Tantras* call Sachchidananda Shiva and the *Puranas* call Sachchidananda Krishna."

Sri Ramakrishna has heard that Ram sometimes cooks his own meal in his home.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — Do you cook for yourself sometimes?

Mani — No, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Look here. Put a little cow's ghee (clarified butter) in your meals. You will feel your body and mind becoming very pure.

Chapter IV

The father is dharma, he is the heaven and he is the supreme austerity

They have been talking quite a long time about Ram's household life. Ram's father is a staunch Vaishnava and Sridhar (Sri Krishna) is worshipped in his house daily. His father married a second time when Ram was very young. The father and stepmother lived with Ram, but Ram was not happy living with his stepmother. She is now forty. Ram is sometimes cross with his father because of his stepmother. This is the topic of conversation today.

Ram — My father is not the good man he was.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Do you hear? His father is not good – but he is.

Ram — There is no peace when she (the stepmother) comes to the house! Something unfortunate is bound to happen. Our household is breaking apart. I say it would be better for her to go and live with her parents.

Girindra (to Ram) — Why don't you keep your wife at her father's house in the same way? (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Are they like pots and pans, that the pot be here and its lid somewhere else? Shiva here and Shakti there?

Ram — Sir, we are living happily indeed. But when she comes to the house, family life falls apart.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, you can build a house for them elsewhere. This is another way. Give them their monthly expenses. Parents are big gurus. Rakhal once asked me whether he could eat from the same plate his father had used. I said, 'What are you saying? What has happened to you that you can't eat from your father's plate?'

"But this is the fact: they who are real devotees do not give their leftover food to anyone – not even to dogs."

Worship the guru as your Ideal Deity – the guru not to be given up even if he is immoral

Girindra — Sir, what if the parents are guilty of some grave offense, that they have committed a serious sin?

Sri Ramakrishna — Let them! The mother, even if she is of easy virtue, should not be forsaken. When the woman guru of a certain family became immoral, it was said that her son be made the guru. I said, 'But why? You want to give up the yam and take the shoot. Even if she has gone wrong, what does it matter? You must take her as the guru.' 'Even though my guru visits the tavern, he is still my ever-blissful guru.'

Chaitanya Deva and his mother – a man's debts – his duties

"Are parents such insignificant persons? No spiritual or other effort can be achieved if they are not pleased. Chaitanya Deva was intoxicated with love for God. Yet before embracing sannyasa, he implored his mother for many days. He said, 'Mother, I will come every now and then to see you.'

(To M., reprimanding him) "And I tell you, your parents have reared you. And you have so many children. Yet you have left home with your wife and children. 'Leaving behind the father and mother, the baul becomes a Vaishnava and comes away with his wife and son.' Your father is well provided for. Were it not so, I would say, 'Shame on you!' (Everybody in the room is silent.)

"There are certain debts a man must pay: the debt to the deity, to the rishi, to the father, to the mother and also to the wife. Till you pay back the debt to your parents, you can achieve nothing.

"You have to pay back the debt to the wife too. Harish has left his wife to live here. Had there been no

provision for her, I would have called him wicked and a rascal.

"When you have attained jnana, you look on your wife as the embodiment of Bhagavati (Divine Mother). The Chandi says, 'The Divine Power dwells in all elements in the form of the Mother.' She Herself has become your mother

"All women are the manifestations of the Divine Mother. So I cannot scold Brinde (the maidservant). Some people recite verse after verse from the scriptures and talk big, but they act quite the opposite. Ramprasanna[1] is arranging for milk and opium for that Hatha Yogi. He said, 'Manu talks of service to the sadhus.' On the other hand, his old mother hasn't enough to eat. She has to go to the bazaar herself. When I see this, I feel so annoyed."

Who is free from all debts? Sannyasi and his duties

"But then, this is also specifically true. If a person feels intoxicated with God's love, there is no father, no mother, and no wife for him. He may have so much love for the Lord that he may appear to be mad! Such a person has no duties. He is freed from all his debts. What is intoxication with love for God like? In that state one forgets the world. One even forgets one's body that is so dear. Chaitanya Deva had this state. He jumped into the sea unaware that it was a sea. He would fall hard on the ground again and again. He lost hunger, thirst and sleep. He was not at all conscious of his body."

[1] Ramprasanna is a devotee from Ariadaha and the son of Krishnakishore

The Elder Gopal on pilgrimage – Sri Ramakrishna is present, so why go on pilgrimage? Adhar's invitation – Ram's vanity – Sri Ramakrishna meditates

> Thakur suddenly says, "Ah, Chaitanya!" (To the devotees) Was Chaitanya He who is Indivisible Chaitanya (Consciousness)? Vaishnavcharan used to say, '"Gauranga is a bubble of the same Indivisible Consciousness.'"

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you intend to go on pilgrimage?

The Elder Gopal — Yes sir, I may visit some places.

Ram (to the Elder Gopal) — He says that one becomes a *kutichaka* after being a *vahudaka*. The sadhu who visits many holy places is a *vahudaka*. One who doesn't desire to move around, who settles down peacefully at one place on an *asana* is known as a *kutichaka*.

"And he also says this: A bird was sitting on the mast of a ship. It did not know when the ship came out of the holy Ganges and entered the black waters of the ocean. When it became aware of the ocean, it wanted to know where the land was. Flying to the north and finding no shore, it returned. Having rested for awhile, it flew south, but found no shore there either. Out of breath, it returned. Then it flew to the west and to the east after resting awhile on the same mast. When it found land or shore nowhere, it perched peacefully on the mast."

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Elder Gopal) — As long as one thinks that the Lord is somewhere 'there', one is ignorant. But when one thinks that God is definitely 'here', that is jnana.

"Somebody wanted a smoke. He went to his neighbour's home to get a light. It was quite late at night, so the neighbours were all asleep. When he had knocked for a long time, somebody came downstairs to open the door. Seeing the caller, he asked, 'What is the matter?' The former said, 'Nothing more than this: I am addicted to smoking, you already know about that. So I have come for a light.' Then the man said, 'You are a fine man indeed! You have taken the trouble to come here and knocked so long. But you have a lantern in your hand!' (All laugh.)

"What man desires, it is already with him. Yet, he wanders from place to place!"

Is Thakur hinting that he is present there? Why then go on pilgrimage?

Ram — Sir, I now understand why the guru asks some disciples to visit all the four *dhams*[1]. When he goes from place to place and sees that what he sees 'here' is what he sees 'there,' he returns to his guru. All this is done so that the disciple may have firm faith in the words of the guru.

When the conversation stops for awhile, Sri Ramakrishna praises Ram.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Oh, what qualities Ram has! How he serves devotees and looks after them! (To Ram) Adhar told me that you were very hospitable to him.

Adhar's house is in Sobhabazar. He is a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. The Chandi was sung at his house. Thakur and a number of devotees were

[1] Places of pilgrimage

present, but Adhar had forgotten to invite Ram. Ram is a very proud man. He told some friends of his displeasure at this negligence. So Adhar went to Ram's house to apologize.

Ram — Adhar is not to be blamed. I have learned that it was Rakhal's mistake – Rakhal was given the responsibility.

Sri Ramakrishna — You must not find fault with Rakhal. You can bring up mother's milk by pressing his throat [meaning a fairly young and immature person].

Ram — Sir, they say that the Chandi was sung there.

Sri Ramakrishna — Adhar didn't know about that. Just see, the other day he accompanied me to Jadu Mallick's house. When we were leaving, I asked him why he had not offered *pranami* (offering of money to the deity) to Mother Simhavahini[1]. He replied, 'Sir, I didn't know that I was supposed to offer *pranami*.'"

"And even if one is not invited, what is wrong with going to the place where Hari's name is sung? One should go even uninvited where the name of Hari is being chanted. There is no need for an invitation."

[1] The Goddess seated upon a lion

Section XIV

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Dakshineswar and attends a Performance of Chaitanya at Calcutta

Chapter I

Conversation about Rakhal, Narayan (Naran), Nityagopal and the Younger Gopal

It is Sunday, 21 September, 1884, (the sixth day of Aswin, 1291 B.Y.). A number of devotees have gathered in Sri Ramakrishna's room – Ram, Mahendra Mukherji, Chunilal, M. and many others are there.

Chunilal has just returned from Vrindavan. He and Rakhal went there with Balaram. Rakhal and Balaram have not yet returned. Nityagopal is also in Vrindavan. Thakur talks of Vrindavan with Chunilal.

Sri Ramakrishna — How is Rakhal doing?

Chunilal — Sir, he is all right now.

Sri Ramakrishna — Isn't Nityagopal coming back?

Chunilal — He is still there. I saw him before I left.

Sri Ramakrishna — Who is accompanying your wife and the others?

Chunilal — Balaram Babu said that a good and suitable person would be sent to accompany them. He didn't give the name.

Thakur now talks to Mahendra Mukherji about Narayan. Narayan goes to school and is 16 or 17 years old. He visits Thakur off and on. Thakur is very fond of him.

Sri Ramakrishna — He is very guileless, isn't he?

As he says 'guileless', Sri Ramakrishna is filled with joy.

Mahendra — Yes sir, very guileless.

Sri Ramakrishna — His mother came the other day. I was frightened to find her so egotistical. She found out that you and Captain visit here. She must have definitely thought that I and Narayan were not the only ones who come to the temple. (All laugh.) There was some sugar candy in the room. Seeing it she said, 'Nice sugar candy that is!' She must have concluded from this that there is no dearth of food here.

"Then perhaps I said to Baburam in her presence, 'Please keep some sandesh for Narayan and yourself.' Ganu's mother and some other women said, 'Oh God, how he bothers his mother to pay the ferry charges to come here!' His mother said to me, 'Please ask Narayan to marry.' I replied, 'It depends on his destiny. Why should I interfere in such matters?' (All laugh.)

"He doesn't work hard in his studies, so she said, 'Please ask him to study hard.' I said to Narayan, 'You must study hard.' Then she said again, 'Please tell him more emphatically.' (All laugh.)

(To Chunilal) "Well, why doesn't Gopal come?"

Chunilal — He has blood diarrhea.

Sri Ramakrishna — Does he take any medicine?

A courtesan acting in theatre – his past story – Thakur sees a balloon going up and is inspired

Today Thakur is to visit the Star Theatre[1] in Calcutta and witness the Chaitanya Lila (play of Chaitanya). He will go with Mahendra Mukherji in his carriage to see the play. They discuss where they should sit to get a good view. Somebody suggests that a one Rupee seat gives a good view. Ram says, "Why? We will take a box."

Thakur laughs. Somebody says, "Courtesans act in these plays. They play the role of Chaitanya Deva, Nitai and others."

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — I shall look upon them all as the All-Blissful Mother.

"Let them act as Chaitanya Deva. Seeing an imitation custard apple made of *sola* (a dry plant), one has the feeling of a real custard apple.

"A devotee walking on the road saw a number of *babul* (acacia) trees. The devotee was instantly absorbed in bhava (divine fervour). He remembered that the beautiful handle of the spade in the garden of Shyamasundar [Krishna] is made of the same wood. It at once brought the thought of Shyamasundar to his mind! When they took me to the Fort Maidan to see the balloon, I saw a European boy standing against a tree with his body bent at three places. Immediately, I was inspired with Krishna and went into samadhi!

[1] The premises of the Star Theatre is now the Kohinoor Theatre

"Chaitanya Deva was passing by the Meda village. He was told that they make *khol* (drum, used in kirtan) with clay from this village. At once he went into ecstasy.

"Seeing a cloud or the neck of a peacock, Radha could not control herself. She would be overcome with the presence of Sri Krishna and lose all outer consciousness."

Thakur is now silent for awhile. After some time, he resumes the conversation: "Radha's *mahabhava* – the *prema* (intense love) of the gopis was desireless. A genuine devotee has no desire. He merely prays for pure love for God. He doesn't ask for occult powers, or any other power."

Chapter II

Instructions by the Naked One – the eight occult powers are an obstacle in attaining the Lord

Sri Ramakrishna — Occult powers bring great troubles. The Naked One (Tota Puri) counseled me, saying, 'A man who had occult powers was sitting on the seashore. The sea became stormy. Afraid that the storm would harm him, the man said, 'Let the storm halt at once.' His words could not remain unfulfilled. A ship with a mast was passing. When the storm died down so abruptly, the ship sank. All the passengers occupying the ship went down with it. Thus he contracted the sin of drowning so many people! The sin resulted not only in losing his occult powers, but also sent him to hell.'

"A sadhu possessed many occult powers. This also made him very proud. But this man was basically a good fellow and had a lot of *tapasya* (penance) to his credit. Bhagavan one day came to him disguised as a sadhu and said, 'Maharaj, I hear that you have acquired many occult powers.' The sadhu asked him very

cordially to sit down. Just then an elephant was passing that way. The second sadhu said, 'Well Maharaj, can you kill this elephant by a mere wish?' The first sadhu said, 'Yes, it is possible.' Saying so, he took a little dust, muttered a few words and threw it on the body of the elephant. Lo! It died, writhing in pain. The visitor sadhu thereupon said, 'You indeed have great powers! You have killed the elephant.' The first sadhu began to laugh. The other sadhu then said, 'Well, can you bring the elephant back to life?' The other sadhu said, 'That, too, is possible.' Saying so, he muttered a few words and threw some dust on the elephant. It staggered up. The other sadhu then said, 'Oh, how powerful you are! But I ask you this: What have you gained by killing the elephant and then bringing it back to life? What spiritual progress were you able to achieve by it? Has it helped you to realize Bhagavan?' Saying so, that sadhu disappeared.

"Religion is a very delicate matter. Even the smallest trace of desire can stop you from attaining Bhagavan. A thread does not pass through the eye of a needle if its end has any fibers sticking out.

"Krishna said to Arjuna: Brother, if you wish to attain Me, even one of the eight occult powers will obstruct your reaching Me.

"The fact is that one becomes proud if one possesses occult powers. And this makes one forget the Lord.

"A cross-eyed gentleman came to see me. He said, 'It is good that you are a paramahamsa. Please perform *sawastyayana* (a religious practice for the attainment of worldly desire) for me.' What low intelligence! A paramahamsa should perform a *sawastyayana*! It is an occult power if one cures a person by performing *sawastyayana*. Pride stops you from attaining the Lord.

Do you know what it is to be proud? Say, there is a high mound. You will see that it cannot hold rainwater; the rainwater just runs off. On the other hand, low land holds water. It helps plants to germinate and grow into trees. The trees later bear fruits."

Love all – love dispels egoism and leads to God-realization

"So I say to Hazra, 'Don't think that you alone understand everything and that everyone else is a fool. You must love everyone. Nobody is a stranger. Hari dwells in all beings. Nothing exists without Him.' Bhagavan said to Prahlada, 'Ask for a boon.' Prahlada replied, 'I have had Your vision. I need nothing else.' But Bhagavan would not listen. Then Prahlada said, 'If You want to grant me a boon, then please don't punish those who have troubled me.'

"It means that it was the Lord Hari Himself who had inflicted troubles on him. By harming those people, one would be harming the Lord Himself."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna surcharged with madness of jnana – his caste differentiation

His earlier story of 1857 – he meets a person with the madness of jnana just after the Kali Temple was founded – Haladhari

Sri Ramakrishna — Radha was seized with the madness of *prema* (ecstatic love) and also with the madness of bhakti – just like Hanuman. Seeing Sita entering the fire, he went toward Rama to hit him. And then there is the madness of jnana. Just after the Kali Temple was founded, I saw a jnani who looked crazed.

People said that he belonged to the Brahmo Society of Rammohan Roy. A shoe on one of his feet was tattered. He was holding a bamboo branch in one hand and an earthen pot with a mango plant in the other. He took a dip in the Ganges and then entered the Kali Temple. Haladhari was sitting in the shrine. Later, the man began to sing a hymn in frenzy –

Kshon kshon Khattangadharini[1] etc.

"He went near a dog, held its ear and shared its food. The dog did not react. I had also begun to experience a state of divine madness. I embraced Hriday and said to him, 'Oh, Hriday! Am I also going to be put in such a state?'

"My state of madness! Narayan Shastri came and saw me strolling with a bamboo pole on my shoulder. He told people that I was in divine intoxication. In such a state, one does not distinguish one's own caste from others. The wife of a man of low caste would cook a vegetable and send it to me and I would eat it.

"After the beggars and indigents had eaten and left the Kali Temple, I would take their leaf plates and touch them to my head and face. Haladhari said to me, 'What are you doing? You are eating the leftover food of these indigents. How will you marry off your children?' This made me very angry. Haladhari was my elder cousin brother. But what did it matter? I said to him, 'Oh rascal, is it for this that you study the *Gita* and the Vedanta? Don't you teach that only Brahman is the reality and the world illusory? You think that I am also going to have children! Fie on your study of the *Gita*!'

[1] Divine Mother wearing a dress of a particular kind of grass

(To M.) "Look here, mere study does not help. A person may be able to recite musical notation very nicely. But it is very difficult to play it."

Thakur is further describing his state of intoxication of jnana.

His past story – in Navadvip with Mathur – Thakur falls at the feet of Chine Sankhari

"I was on a boat trip with Mathur Babu for several days. During that trip we visited Navadvip. I saw that the boatmen were cooking very good food in the boat and Mathur Babu knew that I would ask for it and eat it. So he said, 'Father, do come here, come away.'

"But I can't do it now. Now I am in a different state of mind. Now I only eat rice given by a pious man, a brahmin, or that offered to deities.

"What states have I passed through! In my village I would say to Chine Sankhari and the other companions of my age, 'Brother, I fall at your feet. Just utter Haribol once.' And I could fall at anybody's feet. Chine said, 'Oh brother, it is your first experience of *anuraga* (divine love). That is why you see everyone as equal.' When a stormy wind blows, it raises a lot of dust and one sees no difference between the tamarind and the mango trees – one cannot distinguish the mango tree from the tamarind tree."

What does Sri Ramakrishna believe in: in household life or complete renunciation? Keshab Sen's doubt

A Devotee — How will a householder be able to go on with his duties of the world, if he experiences such madness of bhakti, or of *prema* (intense love), or of jnana?

Sri Ramakrishna (looking at the householder devotee) — There are two classes of yogis: *vyakta* (one who can be seen outwardly as a yogi) and the other, *gupta* (who hides his yoga). A householder is a *gupta* yogi, he doesn't let others know of it. The householder renounces mentally, not externally.

Ram — This is like comforting a young boy. One can be a jnani in the household, but not a vijnani.

Sri Ramakrishna — If he wants finally to be a vijnani, he can become so. It is not right to renounce the household by forcing yourself.

Ram — Keshab Sen used to say, 'Why do so many people go to him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna]? He will one day gently sting them. Then they will run away from him.'

Sri Ramakrishna — Why should I sting gently? I tell people, 'Do 'this' and do 'that' too – live in the family and also call on the Lord.' I don't ask them for complete renunciation. (Laughing) Keshab Sen one day said in one of his lectures, 'Oh Lord, grant that we may dive into the river of bhakti and be carried to the ocean of Sachchidananda.' All the ladies were behind a screen. I said to Keshab, 'How could you all dive together? If you did that, what would happen to these ladies? First climb to dry land and then dive. And then again climb up to the dry land.' Keshab and all other began to laugh. Hazra said to me, 'You are very fond of rajasic[1] people – those who have a lot of money, name, fame, and public respect.' If that is so, why do I love Harish, Noto (Latu) and others? Why am I fond of Narendra? He doesn't even have salt to eat with his roasted banana!

[1] People endowed with the quality of rajas

Sri Ramakrishna comes out of his room and goes toward the Jhautala talking with M. on the way. A devotee accompanies him with a washing pot and a hand towel. He is to go to Calcutta to witness the Chaitanya Lila – this topic is being discussed.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M., as they approach the Panchavati) — Ram does everything in a rajasic way. What is the need to spend so much for a seat?

What Thakur means is that there was no need to buy tickets for the box class.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna at a devotee's place in Hathibagan – Mahendra Mukherji's service to him

Sri Ramakrishna is going from Dakshineswar to Calcutta by Mahendra Mukherji's carriage. It is Sunday, 21 September, 1884, the sixth of Aswin, the second day of the bright fortnight of the month of Aswin. It is five o'clock. Mahendra Mukherji, M. and a couple of other persons are also in the carriage. The carriage hasn't gone far when Thakur goes into the state of samadhi while meditating on the Lord.

The samadhi breaks after a long time. Thakur says, "And Hazra tries to teach me. Rascal!" After awhile, he says, "I shall take some water." Thakur often says this after coming out of samadhi, to bring his mind down to the outer world.

Mahendra Mukherji (to M) — Shall I bring something to eat?

M. — He will not eat now.

Sri Ramakrishna (still in the ecstatic mood) — I shall eat. I shall ease myself.

Mahendra Mukherji has a flour mill in Hathibagan. He is taking Thakur to the mill. After resting for awhile, Thakur will go to the Star Theatre to see the Chaitanya Lila. Mahendra's house is in Baghbazar, a little to the north of the Madan Mohan temple. His father is not acquainted with the Paramahamsa Deva, so Mahendra hasn't taken Thakur to his house. Priyanath, his second brother, is a devotee.

A cotton carpet has been spread over a wooden cot in Mahendra's mill. Thakur is sitting there talking on spiritual matters.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M. and Mahendra) — Hearing the narration of the Chaitanya Charitamrita, Hazra said, 'It is all the sport of Shakti (Divine Power). There is no Vibhu[1] in it.' Can there be Shakti without Vibhu? He is trying to disprove the teachings of this place [of Sri Ramakrishna].

Brahman pervades all as Vibhu – a pure devotee doesn't want the six supernatural powers

"I know that Brahman and Shakti are not separate from each other. They are like water and its wetness, or fire and its power to burn. God is present in the form of Vibhu, though there is greater manifestation of His Shakti in some, less in others. Besides, Hazra says, 'When one attains Bhagavan, one acquires the six supernatural powers like Him. There will be six powers in one's grasp, which may or may not be used.' "

M. — One must have the six powers in one's grasp! (All laugh.)

[1] All-pervading Consciousness

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Yes, one must possess them. But what a low intellect! He who has never enjoyed powers is eager to possess them. The pure devotee never prays for these powers.

Betel leaves have not been served in the mill. Thakur says, "Please fetch some betel leaves." He has to go to ease himself. Mahendra gets a pot of water and holds it in his hand. He will accompany Thakur out in the open space. Seeing Mani standing in front of him, Thakur says to Mahendra, "You don't have to carry it. Give it to him." Mani takes the washing pot and accompanies Thakur to the open space inside the mill. After the wash, Thakur is offered a smoke from the hookah. Thakur says to M., "Is it already *sandhya* (twilight hour)? If so, I shall not smoke from the hookah. When *sandhya* is approaching, one should remember Hari and forget everything else." Saying this, Thakur sees whether he can count the hair on his hand. If he cannot, it is already dusk.

Chapter V

Chaitanya Lila in the theatre – Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi

M., Baburam, a devotee of the lineage of Nityananda, Mahendra Mukherji and Girish

Thakur's cab arrives in front of the Star Theatre on Beadon Street at about 8.30 p.m. He is accompanied by M., Baburam, Mahendra Mukherji and one or two other devotees. They are purchasing the tickets. Girish Ghosh, the manager of the theatre, comes to Thakur's carriage with some theatre employees. They welcome him and cordially take him upstairs. Girish knows the Paramahamsa Deva by name. He is extremely happy that Thakur has come to witness the performance of Chaitanya Lila. Thakur is given a seat in the southwestern box. M. is seated beside him.

Baburam and one or two devotees are seated behind them.

The theatre hall is well lit. The seats on the ground floor are filled. Some boxes are also occupied. Each box has an attendant who fans the spectators from behind. Girish has appointed an attendant to fan Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna is as happy as a child to see the theatre hall.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M., laughing) — Ah! It is very nice! It is good we came. I get inspired when there are many people around. I then clearly see that He has become all.

M. — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — What will they charge us?

M. — They will not charge us anything. They are glad that you came.

Sri Ramakrishna — It's all the Mother's greatness!

The curtain rises. All the spectators turn their eyes toward the stage. The first scene shows a meeting of sin and the six enemies[1]. It is followed by a dialogue between discrimination, dispassion and bhakti.

Bhakti says, "Gauranga has taken birth in Nadia. That is why the learned and the rishis and munis are coming in disguise to see him."

Blessed is the earth that Lord Gauranga has appeared in Nadia.

Behold, the demi-gods are coming by a flying chariot to have a glimpse of Lord Hari.

[1] The six passions: lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride and envy

And lo! All the rishis and munis filled with divine love are coming too.

The demi-gods and goddesses, the rishis and munis, sing a hymn of praise to Gauranga, looking upon him as an incarnation of God. Seeing them, Thakur passes into an ecstatic mood. He says to M., "Ah! How wonderful it is."

The demi-gods and goddesses, the rishis and the munis sing the hymn –

Men — Keshab, bestow your compassion on us, the lowly, you who roam the groves and glades (of Vrindavan).

Women — You, the beloved Madhava, the charming Mohan playing the flute.

Chorus — Haribol, Haribol, Haribol (chant the name of Hari), O my mind!

Men — The lad of Braja, the tamer of Kaliya, the serpent and the dispeller of fear and harm.

Women — You with slanting eyes and the peacock feather arching on your forehead, the heart-throb of Radha!

Men — It was you who lifted the Govardhan Mount. Wild flowers decorate your person. O Damodara, the destroyer of Kamsa's pride.

Women — O Shyam, you sported with the milkmaids of Vrindavan.

Chorus — Haribol, Haribol, Haribol (chant the name of Hari), O my mind!

As the demi-goddesses sing, "You with slanting eyes and the peacock feather arching on your forehead, the heartthrob of Radha," Sri Ramakrishna goes into deep samadhi. The concert goes on, but he is unaware of the external world.

Chapter VI

Witnessing of Chaitanya Lila – Sri Ramakrishna becomes intoxicated with intense love of Gaur

Jagannath Misra (Nimai's father) has received guests. The child Nimai is strolling and singing joyfully with the companions of his age –

Where is my Vrindavan and where is mother Yashoda? Where is my father, Nanda, and where, brother Balai?

Where are my twin cows, black and white, and where is my bewitching flute? Where can I find Sridama, Sudama and the other cowherd boys?

Where is my Jamuna's bank and where my banana grove? Where, my milkmaids and my Radha?

The guests offer food to Bhagavan with their eyes shut. Nimai comes running and eats the holy food. The guests recognize him as Bhagavan and sing the hymn of the ten avatars[1] to please him. While taking leave of Misra and Sachi, they sing another hymn –

Victory to Nityananda and Gaur, victory to the redeemer,

The refuge of the helpless, the soul of the embodied soul and the dispeller of fear!

[1] The ten avatars: The fish, the turtle, the sow, Narasimha (half man, half lion), vamana (a dwarf), Parashurama (a warrior sage in Hindu mythology), Rama, Krishna, Buddha and the Kalki avatar (the name of the next and last Incarnation according to the Puranas)

In every new age You sport in a new way. A new role with every new wave, You who bear the burden of the universe.

You take away the fire of the world with the rain of Your divine love, You the distributor of the joy of Your divine sport.

The hope of the lowly, the destroyer of all sins and the remover of all cause of fear.

As Thakur hears the hymn, he again passes into an ecstatic mood.

On the bank of the Ganges in Navadvip, after their dip in the Ganges, the brahmins and the men and women perform worship. Nimai snatches the food offering and eats it. A brahmin is very annoyed with him and shouts, "You mischievous boy! You are snatching the holy food of Vishnu's puja. You will be totally ruined!" Nimai still grabs it and is about to run away. Most of the women are very fond of this boy. They cannot bear to see Nimai leaving. They call out, "Nimai, come back! Do come back!" But Nimai does not listen to them.

Somebody knows the great mantra that will force Nimai to return. He begins to chant, "Haribol, Haribol." Immediately Nimai returns, repeating, "Haribol, Haribol."

Mani is seated beside Thakur. He is exclaiming, "Ah!"

Thakur cannot contain himself any longer. He begins to shed tears of love looking at Mani as he utters, "Ah."

Sri Ramakrishna (to Baburam and M.) — Listen here, if I pass into an ecstatic mood or samadhi, you must not create a fuss about it. Worldly people will think that I am feigning it.

> It is the sacred thread ceremony of Nimai. Nimai is in the robes of a sannyasin. He is surrounded by Sachi and the women of the area. Nimai sings a song to beg for alms –
>
> > O give me alms my mother. I am a new yogi roaming about weeping.
> >
> > O the people of Braja, I love you. O mother, that is why I have come! See, I am fasting.
> >
> > See mother! A yogi is repeating, 'Radha, Radha,' at your door. The time is up and he has to return. Mother, I live alone on the bank of Jamuna.
> >
> > The water from my eyes meet the water of the Jamuna and flows slowly to mix with the waves in a gentle roar.
>
> Everybody leaves except Nimai who stays alone. The gods in the guise of brahmin men and women are singing a hymn.

Men — The light of the moon shines in you. You have the form of *vamana* (a dwarf).

Women — You, the beloved of the milkmaids, the wanderer among the beautiful groves of Vrindavan.

Nimai — Victory to Radha, Sri Radha.

Men — The boys of Braja are with you. Your beauty puts to shame the pride of Madan, the god of love.

Women — Your love has intoxicated the gopis of Braja. There are waves of ecstasy.

Men — You who delude the demons, you are the Lord Narayana, the dispeller of the fear of gods.

Women — You roam about in Braja and beg love from the gopis.

Nimai — Victory to Radha, Sri Radha.

Sri Ramakrishna enters samadhi hearing the song. The curtain drops. The concert orchestra is playing a single tune.

Worldly people want to hold onto both: the world and God – Gangadas and Srivas

Srivas and others are in conversation in front of Advaita's home. Mukanda sings in a sweet voice –

O my mind, don't go to sleep. You have remained oblivious, intoxicated with maya for so long.

Who are you? Why have you come? You have forgotten yourself.

Come out of this bad dream, open your eyes and see.

You are living with transitory things. Look for the eternal within yourself.

Come out of the darkness and see the bright light of the sun.

Mukanda has a very sweet voice. Sri Ramakrishna is praising him to Mani.

Nimai is at home. Srivas has come to see him. First he meets Sachi. Sachi weeps and says, "My son doesn't show interest in domestic duties."

I constantly tremble with fear ever since Viswarupa (her eldest son) left, lest Nimai should also embrace sannyasa.

Nimai arrives now. Sachi says to Srivas –

Alas, look at him. What crazy looks he has!

Tears from his eyes have drenched his chest.

Tell me, please tell me, how I can free him of this mood.

Nimai weeps, holding Srivas's feet and says –

O Lord, where do I have bhakti for Krishna?

My wretched life is now of no avail!

Tell me, O Lord, where is Krishna? How can I attain Krishna?

Kindly give me the dust of your feet so that I may be able to attain Banmali[1].

Sri Ramakrishna continues to look at M. and wants to talk, but cannot. His throat is choked with emotion, his cheeks drenched with tears. He stares at Nimai, holding the feet of Srivas. Nimai is saying, "O Lord, how do I have love for Krishna?"

Nimai is not able to give lessons to his students. Gangadas was his teacher. Gangadas has come to instruct Nimai. He says to Srivas, "Revered Srivas, we are brahmins too. We, too, worship Vishnu. You people have ruined the household life (of Nimai)."

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — It is a householder's instruction, 'Do this and also do that.' When a householder teaches, he wants you to hold onto both the world and God.

M. — True, sir.

Gangadas further instructs Nimai, "I say Nimai, you are well versed in scriptures. Discuss it with me.

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[1] An appellation Sri Krishna; one wearing a garland of wild flowers

What is more important than the householder's dharma? Please explain it to me. You are a householder, so why do you conduct yourself otherwise?"

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — See, he is saying this to uphold both sides [worldly and spiritual].

M. — Yes, sir.

Nimai says: I am not willingly unmindful of the household life. On the contrary, I wish for both sides to be taken care of. But –

Lord, I do not know at all why all this is happening.

Alas! What I am doing is through the attraction of my heart!

I wish I could live in the family, but I cannot.

My soul is flying out and there is no way to bring it back.

It is ever longing to jump into the deep sea.

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah!

Chapter VII

A descendant of Nityananda's family in the theatre and Sri Ramakrishna's inspiration – M., Baburam, the Goswami from Khardaha, of the lineage of Nityananda

Nityananda has arrived at Navadvip. He has been looking for Nimai, and Nimai for him. At that very moment, he meets Nimai. When they meet, Nimai says –

My life is blessed. My dream has come true. You had hidden yourself after appearing in a dream.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M., in a voice choked with emotion) — Nimai says, 'I saw you in a dream.'

Srivas is seeing the six-armed divine form and he sings his praises. Sri Ramakrishna also sees the six-armed divine form absorbed in bhava. Gauranga is in ecstasy. He talks to Advaita, Srivas, Haridas and others in an ecstatic mood.

Recognizing the ecstatic mood of Gauranga, Nitai sings –

O the Beloved of my soul, where is Krishna in the grove?

Please bring me my Krishna, O my beloved friend! Whom does Radha know except Krishna?

Sri Ramakrishna passes into samadhi on hearing the song. He remains in this mood for a long time. The orchestra goes on. Thakur's samadhi comes to an end. In the meantime, a gentleman from Nityananda Goswami's lineage of Khardaha comes in and stands behind Thakur's chair. He is thirty-four or thirty-five. Seeing him, Thakur is filled with joy. Holding his hand, he talks to him for a long time. He asks him a number of times to take a seat close to him, saying that he feels greatly inspired by his presence. He holds his hand and shows his love and regard by bringing the hand to touch his face.

As the Goswami leaves, Thakur says to M., "He is a great scholar. His father is a great devotee. When I go to Khardaha for the darshan[1] of Shyamasundar, his father feeds me offered food worth more than a hundred rupees."

"He has very good traits. Just nudging him a little easily arouses his consciousness. I get greatly inspired

[1] To see and pay homage

looking at him. Had he been here a little while longer, I would have stood up [in ecstasy]."

What Thakur means is that if he had been with the Goswami a little longer, he would have gone into an ecstatic mood.

The curtain rises. Nityananda is seated on the main road with his hand on his head to stop his bleeding. Madhai has thrown a brass pot at him and its edge has hurt him. But Nitai is absolutely indifferent to it – he is intoxicated with the love of Gauranga, filled as if up to the neck. Sri Ramakrishna is absorbed in an ecstatic mood. He watches Nitai embracing Jagai and Madhai. Says Nitai –

Come on, Jagai and Madhai, come dancing. Let us utter Haribol to our hearts' content.

If you have struck me, you have done well. Sing 'Hari, Hari' and dance.

Repeat Haribol. The lovers will embrace you in love divine.

Raise, O raise, the name of Hari. Let the word resound all around.

You have not yet tasted *prema*. O brother, say Haribol and weep. Then you will see the moon in your heart.

O brother! I will lovingly dole out His name. That is why Nitai is calling so lovingly.

Now Nimai is talking to Sachi about his sannyasa.

Sachi falls into a swoon. Seeing her faint, many in the audience sob with grief. Sri Ramakrishna, however, remains perfectly self-composed. Except that one can see a tear in the corner of his eye.

Chapter VIII

Sri Ramakrishna intoxicated with the love of Gaur

The performance ends. Sri Ramakrishna gets into a carriage. A devotee asks him, "How did you like it?" Thakur laughs and says, "The performance was truly the same as the reality."

The carriage is proceeding toward Mahendra Mukherji's mill. Suddenly Thakur passes into an ecstatic mood. After a long time, he murmurs lovingly:

" 'Oh, Krishna! Oh, Krishna! Jnana is Krishna! *Prana* (vital breath) is Krishna! The mind is Krishna! The Atman is Krishna! The body is Krishna!' And he adds, 'The beloved of my soul, oh Govinda! You are my life.' "

The carriage arrives at Mukherji's mill. Mahendra treats Thakur to refreshments with the utmost hospitality and love. Mani is seated nearby. Thakur says lovingly to him, "Please take something." Then he himself gives some prasad of sweetmeats to him.

Now Sri Ramakrishna is going to the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. He is accompanied in the carriage by Mahendra Mukherji and two or three other devotees. Mahendra is to leave the carriage after some distance. Thakur is full of joy and begins to sing –

O Lord, Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers …[1]

Mani sings with him.

Mahendra intends to go on pilgrimage. This is the topic of conversation with Thakur.

[1] For the complete song, see Section XII, Chapter III of this volume

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahendra, laughing) — The sprout of *prema* (divine love) will wither away before it starts to develop within you.

"But come back quickly. Oh, for so many days I had been thinking of visiting your house. It is good that I visited it once."

Mahendra — Sir, my life is blessed.

Sri Ramakrishna — You are already blessed. And your father is also a nice man. I met him the other day. He has faith in *Adhyatma* (*Ramayana*).

Mahendra — Sir, grant that I may have bhakti by your grace.

Sri Ramakrishna — You are very large-hearted and guileless. One cannot attain Bhagavan without being guileless and generous. One must shun hypocrisy.

Mahendra takes his leave near Shyambazar. The carriage moves on.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — What has Jadu Mallick done?

M. (to himself) — Thakur is so interested in the welfare of everyone! Has he incarnated in a human body to teach bhakti, like Chaitanya Deva?

Section XV

Sri Ramakrishna in Sadharan Brahmo Samaj – Instructions to Vijay Goswami

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna in the temple of Sadharan Brahmo Samaj

M., Hazra, Vijay, Shivanath and Kedar

Today Sri Ramakrishna has come to the city of Calcutta. It is Friday, 26 September, 1884, the *saptami* puja[1] day. Thakur has a number of engagements to attend. It is the great Shardiya (autumn) festival. Almost every Hindu house in the metropolis is performing the *saptami* puja of the Divine Mother. Sri Ramakrishna will pay homage to the image in Adhar's house and take part in the joyous festival of the All-Blissful Mother. He also wishes to see Shivanath.

With umbrella in hand, M. strolls the footpath of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj about midday. One o'clock strikes, and then two, but Thakur does not arrive. Now and then M. sits on the steps of Mahalnavish's dispensary and watches the joy of the boys on Durga Puja and how young and old alike are engaged in various activities.

Thakur's carriage arrives around three o'clock. Stepping down from the carriage and seeing the Samaj temple in front of him, Thakur joins his hands

[1] The autumnal worship of Goddess Durga on the seventh day of the lunar fortnight

in salutation. He is accompanied by Hazra and one or two other devotees. Seeing Thakur, M. salutes him, falling at his feet. Thakur says, "I will go to Shivanath's house." Hearing that Thakur has arrived, the Brahmo devotees gather around in no time. Taking Sri Ramakrishna with them, they reach the door of Shivanath's house in the area where the Brahmos live. Shivanath is not at home. What to do? Soon Vijay Goswami, Mahalnavish and other workers of the Brahmo Samaj arrive. They greet Thakur and take him to the Samaj temple. "Please rest awhile," they say. "Shivanath should return soon."

Thakur sits down with a smiling face, full of joy. An *asana* was prepared for him below the dais where the musical party will sing devotional songs. Vijay and other Brahmo devotees sit in front of him.

Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and signboard – harmony between formless God and God with form

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing to Vijay) — I was told that there was a signboard here saying that people of other faiths cannot come in. Narendra said to me, 'You shouldn't go to the Brahmo Samaj. It would be better to go to Shivanath's house.'

"But I say everybody is calling upon God. One should give up jealously and antagonism. Some people say that God is with form, others say that He is formless. I say that he who has faith in God with form should meditate on Him as such, and he who believes in the formless God should meditate on God without form. Yet dogmatism is not good: to say that my faith is correct and others are wrong. It is good to believe that one's faith is right – but that one does not know whether the faith of others is right or wrong, true or untrue. The reason is that until you have God's vision, it is not possible to know His true nature. Kabir said, 'God with form is my mother, the Formless is my father.

With whom can I find fault? Whom can I worship? Both pans of the scale are equally heavy.'

"All of you – Hindus, Mohammedans, Christians, Shaktas, Shaivites, Vaishnavas, the ancient Brahmajnanis of the era of the rishis and the present day Brahmajnanis among you – are asking for the same Substance. A mother provides food that suits each stomach. She cooks fish differently for each of her five children. She doesn't make *pulao*[1] and *kalia*[2] for all of them because their digestions are different. For some she makes fish curry. But the mother loves all her children equally.

"Do you know my attitude? I like to eat fish prepared in all different ways. I have a feminine nature! (All laugh.) I like to eat fried fish, fish smeared with turmeric, sour fish, small dry fish cooked with spiced vegetables and the rest. Furthermore, I like the seasoned head of fish as well as *pulao* and *kalia* dishes. (All laugh.)

"Do you know how it is? Different religions are based on different times, places and people. But all the religions are only different paths. The paths are themselves not the Lord, though if you have sincere bhakti and tread any path, you can reach Him. If there is an error in a particular path you choose, He will correct it if you are sincere. Suppose one sets out yearningly to visit Lord Jagannath [at Puri] and instead of going toward the south, he goes north. Somebody will surely tell him the way. He will tell him not to proceed, but to turn south. This fellow is sure to see Lord Jagannath sooner or later.

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[1] A highly spiced fish dish of rice and meat cooked in clarified butter
[2] A rich curry of fish

"At the same time you must not say that paths other than your own are erroneous. It is for the Creator of the universe to take care of that. Our duty is to somehow have the darshan of Lord Jagannath. (To the Brahmos) Your path is very good. You take Him as formless. This is indeed good. Bread sweetened with sugar candy, whether eaten straight or sidewise, will always taste sweet.

"Even so, it is not good to be dogmatic. You have heard the story of the chameleon. A man went out to ease himself. He saw a chameleon on a tree trunk. He came and told his friends that he had seen a red chameleon. He was absolutely sure that it was red. Another person went to the tree and said that he had seen a green chameleon. He was also convinced that it was green and no other colour. But the man who lived under the tree said, 'What both of you have said is correct, but the creature is sometimes red, sometimes green, sometimes yellow and sometimes it has no colour at all.'

"The *Vedas* talk of God as both *saguna*[1] and *nirguna*[2]. You people just call Him formless. You are staunch believers in that one concept. That's all right, let it be. When you know one of His aspects truly, you will come to know of His other aspects too. God Himself will make you understand. You people who come here know this gentleman, and that one too (pointing at one or two Brahmo devotees)."

[1] With attributes
[2] Without attributes

Chapter II

Instructions to Vijay Goswami

Vijay is still a member of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj – he is a paid preacher of this Samaj. However, he does not agree with the rules and regulations of the present Brahmo Samaj. He also associates with believers in God with form. This has caused estrangement with the authorities of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. Many of the Brahmo devotees of the Samaj are displeased with him. Thakur suddenly addresses Vijay –

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vijay, smiling) — They condemn you because you meet people who believe in God with form. The devotees of God must have a firm and steadfast understanding[1] – like the blacksmith's anvil. It receives hammer blows unceasingly, but it remains unchanged. Unfriendly people may find fault with you and speak ill of you, but if you sincerely love Bhagavan, you will bear all this. Is it not possible to meditate on the Lord while living with the wicked? Remember the rishis who used to meditate on the Lord in forests with tigers, bears and other wild animals around them. Unfriendly people have the nature of tigers and bears – they chase offensively and can harm you.

"You must be careful of many types. First, an important, wealthy man. Rich people can harm you if they wish. You have to talk to them very cautiously. You might even have to agree to something they say. Then there is the dog which you may chase away but it continues to follow you and bark. You have to stand up to it and pacify it with gentle sounds. Then there is the bull, which would attack you with its horns. You have to

[1] *Kutastha* intellect

pacify it also with gentle words. Next there is the lunatic. When you arouse his anger, he will abuse you right and left, even your fourteen ancestors. You should say to him, 'How do you do, uncle?' This will please him. He may even sit and smoke with you.

"When I see a wicked person I am on my guard. If one of them comes and asks if I have a hubble-bubble for him, I say, 'Yes, yes, I have.'

"Some people have the nature of a serpent. You don't know when they will strike. You have to decide on a strategy to face their attack. If you don't consider carefully what to do and you become angry, you may feel like harming him in return to a greater extent. So it is essential that you associate with the holy from time to time. It is only by keeping the company of holy men that you can discriminate between the real and the unreal."

Vijay — I have no time. I remain so busy with work.

Sri Ramakrishna — You are a religious teacher (*acharya*). While others may have leisure, the preacher never has. When the administrator of an estate brings order in one part of it, the landlord sends him to govern another. Likewise, you also never get leisure. (All laugh.)

Vijay (folding his hands) — Please bless me.

Sri Ramakrishna — These are words of an ignorant person. It is the Lord alone who blesses.

Instruction to Brahmo householders – family life and sannyasa

Vijay — Kindly give us instructions.

Sri Ramakrishna (glancing around the Samaj hall with a smile) — This is good in a way – both spiritual and worldly pursuit here. There is the Reality and also absorption in worldly pursuits here. (All laugh.) By 'scoring' too many points, I have been 'burnt' [out of the game]. (All laugh.) Do you know the game called 'nax'? If you score more than 17 points, you are 'burnt'. It is a game of cards. He who scores less than 17 points, maybe 5, 7 or 10, is an expert player. By scoring many points, I am out of the game.

"Once I heard Keshab Sen deliver a lecture at his house. The ladies were seated behind a screen. Keshab Sen said, 'Oh Lord! Bless us that we may dive deep and disappear altogether in the river of bhakti.' I smiled and said to Keshab, 'If you go deep into the river of bhakti, what will be the fate of those who are seated behind the screen? Therefore, do this: dive, but then come up to the shore from time to time. Don't remain in deep waters after you dive.' Hearing this, Keshab and the others burst into laughter.

"Never mind! If you are sincere, you can attain the Lord even while living a family life. 'I' and 'mine' are ignorance. Jnana is knowing, 'Oh, Lord! It's all You and Yours.'

"Live in the household like a maidservant in a rich man's house. She attends to all her chores, she brings up the master's children and calls his son her Hari. But she knows quite well that it is not her house, nor is the boy her son. She attends to all her duties, but inwardly her mind dwells on her native village. Similarly, perform all your household duties, but keep your mind fixed on the Lord. And know that the home, the wife, the son, none are yours. They are all His. You are merely His servant.

"I ask you to have mental renunciation. I don't ask you to leave home. You can attain God if you live unattached with your family and seek Him sincerely."

Brahmo Samaj and yoga of meditation – subjective and objective yoga

(To Vijay) "I used to meditate with my eyes shut. Later on, I asked myself whether the Lord is present when I shut my eyes and not present when I open them. I open my eyes and see that the Lord dwells in everything – He pervades man, birds, beasts, plants and trees; He manifests in the sun and the moon, in water, on dry land, in everything."

Shivanath and Kedar Chatterji

"Why do I like Shivanath? Because he has meditated on the Lord for so long. He who meditates on the Lord has substance and God's power in him. And He who sings well, or plays musical instruments well – anybody who is expert in any branch of knowledge – has divine power within. The *Gita* says this too[1]. And the Chandi says that one who is endowed with exquisite beauty has substance too, has God's power in him. (To Vijay) Ah, what a mood Kedar has developed! As soon as he comes to see me, he begins to weep. His eyes are always full of tears, like the *chanabara*[2] soaked in syrup."

Vijay — There [in Dacca] we only talk of you[3]. He is now very eager to see you.

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[1] Whatever being is glorious, prosperous, or powerful, know that to have sprung but from a spark of My splendour. (Gita 10:41)

[2] Bengali sweetmeat made of fried cheese

[3] Kedar Nath Chatterji, a great devotee, was in Dacca on government duty. Vijay Goswami also used to go to Dacca off and on. He met him there. Both being devotees, they enjoy each other's company.

After some time, Thakur rises. The Brahmo devotees salute him. Thakur returns their salute. He gets into the carriage. He is to go to Adhar's house for the darshan[1] of the image of the Goddess.

[1] To see and pay homage

Section XVI

Sri Ramakrishna in Ram's House with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna in the house of Ram on the Mahashtami Day

Sunday, 28 September, 1884, the Mahashtami[1] day. Sri Ramakrishna has come to Calcutta to have the darshan of the image of the Goddess. The Shardiya (autumnal) festival of Durga is being celebrated in Adhar's house. Thakur is invited for three days. Having had the darshan of the image at Adhar's house, he then goes to Ram's house. Many devotees, including Vijay, Kedar, Ram, Surendra, Chunilal, Narendra, Niranjan, Narayan, Harish, Baburam and M. are present. Balaram and Rakhal are in Vrindavan *dham* (place of pilgrimage).

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling at Vijay and Kedar) — A nice meeting since you both have the same bhava (spiritual mood). (To Vijay) Well, what about Shivanath? Did you…

Vijay — Yes sir, he knows about your going to his house. I have not seen him, but I sent word to him. He knows about it.

Sri Ramakrishna had gone to Shivanath's house to see him, but because of the latter's busy schedule, he

[1] The eighth lunar day of the bright fortnight of Aswin or Kartik which is the second day of the autumnal worship of Goddess Durga

had not been at home. Vijay had told him about the visit later.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vijay and others) — I had four desires in my mind.

"One, that I might eat fish curry with eggplant. Two, that I might meet Shivanath. Three, that I might see devotees repeating the name of Hari on their rosaries. And lastly, that I might see and salute the Tantrik practitioners drinking eight annas worth of wine on the *ashtami*[1] day."

Narendra is seated in front of Sri Ramakrishna. He is 22 or 23 years old. While talking, Thakur glances at him. He immediately stands up and goes into samadhi. Placing his foot on Narendra's knee, he stands there in samadhi. He is totally unconscious of the outside world. His eyes are fixed.

God personal and impersonal – Sachchidananda and *Karanandamayi*[2] – *rajarshi*[3] and *brahmarshi*[4] – *Ishvarakotis* and *jivakotis* – the class of *nityasiddhas*

Sri Ramakrishna comes down from samadhi after a long time. He is still inebriated with divine joy. In a spiritual mood, speaking to himself, he repeats the name of God. Then he says, "Shall I say Sachchidananda! Sachchidananda! Sachchidananda? No. Today is the Mother's day. She is the source and giver of divine intoxication, Karanandamayi. Doh, re, mi, fa, soh, la, ti. It is not right to stay at ti – one cannot stay there long. I would rather stay a note below."

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[1] The eight day of either fortnight of the lunar month
[2] The Divine Mother, giver of divine inebriation
[3] A royal ascetic sage
[4] One who has attained Brahman and teaches its essence to others

"Gross, subtle, causal[1] and Great Cause[2]. When one reaches the Great Cause, it is all quiet. One cannot utter a word.

"*Ishvarakotis* (godmen) can return from the state of Mahakarana. The incarnations of God are *Ishvarakotis*. They ascend to high spiritual states and come down. They climb up onto the roof and come down again by the staircase to move around on lower floors. It is the case of involution and evolution. There is a seven-storied building. Some have access to the outer apartments only, but the prince can roam about on all seven stories.

"There is a kind of fireworks rocket that emits flower-like sparks. It first throws out sparks in one pattern – and then in another. It never stops emitting different patterns of sparks.

"And there is another kind of rocket which, if you light, shoots up for awhile with a hissing sound and then falls down. If an ordinary person goes up after practicing spiritual disciplines, he cannot come back to tell his experience. The *jivakoti* (individual soul) may attain samadhi after practicing spiritual disciplines, but he cannot come back from his samadhi and tell his experiences.

"But then there is the class of the *nityasiddhas*[3] – they seek the Lord from birth and nothing worldly attracts them. The *Vedas* speak of the Homa bird who lives high in the sky. When its egg hatches, the chick falls toward the earth. It keeps falling for many days. During the fall its eyes open. When it is nearing the ground, it gains the awakening – it realizes that as soon as its body touches the ground it will die. In an instant

[1] Karana
[2] Mahakarana
[3] Spiritually perfect since birth

the bird shrieks and darts directly upward toward its mother. Falling to earth means sure death. It is frightened at the sight of the ground and begins to yearn for its mother. She dwells high up in the sky. It flies swiftly and directly toward her! It sees nothing else.

"Those who accompany an incarnation of God are either *nityasiddhas*, or in their last birth."

(To Vijay) "You people have both yoga and bhoga (spiritual inclination and worldly enjoyment). King Janaka had both yoga and bhoga. Thus he was a rajarshi, both a king and sage. Narada was a *devarshi*[1] while Shukadeva was a *brahmarshi* (a sage who had attained Brahman).

"Shukadeva was a *brahmarshi*. He was not a jnani – he was the very manifestation of jnana. Who is a jnani? He who has attained jnana (spiritual wisdom) through the practice of religious disciplines. Shukadeva was the embodiment of jnana, in other words a storehouse of jnana. He became a jnani effortlessly – not by the practice of spiritual disciplines."

While talking, Sri Ramakrishna comes down to the natural state. He will now be able to talk with the devotees.

He asks Kedar to sing. Kedar sings –

Song 1 –

O friend, how can I tell you what is in my mind?

It is forbidden to speak.

Without a real and sympathetic friend, I cannot survive.

The man who can know one's mind can understand it.

[1] A godly person endowed with Supreme Knowledge

He is easily recognized. There are only one or two such people.

Such a person is filled with bhava, becomes absorbed in joy, and he comes and goes through the upstream course.

(A man in bhava frequents the 'upstream course[1]'.)

Song 2 –

The wave of Gaur's love has touched my body.

By its thunder all heretics are crushed and the universe submerged.

I feel my mind should remain absorbed in divinity.

The crocodile of the intense love of moon-like Gaur has swallowed me, O my friend!

Is there any real friend who knows my misery, who can drag me out, holding my hand?

Song 3 –

He who does not recognize the shortcomings of love...

After the songs, Thakur talks to the devotees again. Keshab Sen's nephew, Nandalal, is there. He is seated beside Thakur along with one or two Brahmo friends.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vijay and others) — Somebody brought a bottle of wine. I tried to touch it but couldn't.

Vijay — Ah!

Sri Ramakrishna — When one enjoys a divine mood, one is already inebriated. One doesn't have to drink

[1] Such a person is put in exalted spiritual states – his Kundalini reaches to higher spiritual centres.

wine. The *charanamrita*[1] of the Mother intoxicates me – exactly as if I had drunk five bottles of wine.

The states of a jnani and of a devotee described – rules governing the food of the jnani and the devotee

Sri Ramakrishna — In this state one cannot always take every kind of food.

Narendra — In the matter of drinking and eating, the best is that which chance brings.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is true of a particular state of mind. For a jnani nothing is prohibited. According to the *Gita* the jnani does not eat, he just makes an offering to his Kundalini.

"This does not hold true for the devotee. Now my mood is such that I can't eat unless I am given *bhoga* (food offered to the deity) by a brahmin. Formerly, the state of my mind was such that I would enjoy inhaling the smell of the burning corpses on the other side of Dakshineswar. Now, I can't eat food offered by everyone.

"Though I cannot eat everything, once in awhile I do. Once they took me to Keshab Sen's theatre (Nava Vrindavan). There I was served luchis and a curry seasoned with dry chilies. I don't know whether it was a washerman or a barber[2] who brought the food to me. (All laugh.) I ate it heartily. Rakhal asked me not to eat so much. (To Narendra) You will succeed now. You are in 'this' as well as in 'that'[3]! You may eat everything now.

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[1] The water in which the Deity is bathed

[2] Washermen and barbers are considered to be belonging to a low caste

[3] Meaning that Narendra is attending to both the spiritual life and the worldly life

(To the devotees) "Blessed is the man who is attracted by the Lord, even though he may eat pork. On the other hand, shame on him who is attached to 'lust and greed,' even though he may be eating *havishya*[1]."

His earlier story – Brahmajnana and loss of caste distinction after first state of God-intoxication – journey to Kamarpukur – Dhani, the blacksmith's wife – Ramlal's father – initiation into Allah's name through Govinda Rai

"I had the desire to eat lentils in the house of a blacksmith. I had heard since childhood that blacksmiths said brahmins didn't know how to cook food. So I went and ate at their home – but there was the smell of the iron smithy in it. (All laugh.)

"I received the sacred mantra of Allah from Govinda Rai. He cooked rice with onion in the Kuthi. I took some of it. I ate cooked vegetables in (the Baranagore) garden house of Mani Mallick. But then I developed some aversion to it.

"When I went to my native village [Kamarpukur], Ramlal's father was afraid that I would go and eat in any and every house. He was afraid that I might be declared an outcaste. For this reason I couldn't stay long in the village. I came back."

Right conduct according to the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and the *Tantras*

[1] A holy food consisting of boiled rice with clarified butter

"The *Vedas* and the *Puranas* talk of right conduct. What the *Vedas* and *Puranas* prohibit is recommended in the *Tantras* as good.

"What spiritual states have I passed through! I would open my mouth wide as if it would touch both heaven and the nether world. And I would utter, 'Ma,' (Mother) as though I were pulling the Mother inside, just as the fishes are pulled along with the net."

Song –

O Kali! I am going to devour You this time. O You who are full of compassion for the lowly, I will surely eat You up.

Though I say that I will eat You, yet I'll not take You into my stomach.

Instead I'll make You sit on the lotus of my heart where I shall worship You with my heart.

(I am born under the constellation Ganda yoga (evil star).)

The child who is born under the Ganda yoga constellation eats his own mother.

This time either You will eat me, or I will devour You. And thus the two will become one.

I will smear my hands, face and other parts of the body with black (black being the colour of Kali).

When Yama (god of death) comes and binds me tight, I shall rub his face with Kali (Kali in two senses: one, Mother Kali, and the other, blackness).

If You say that I shall be in trouble with Kala[1] by eating Kali, I tell you that I am not afraid of it.

I will defy him while uttering the name of Kali.

[1] Shiva, the consort of Kali

I shall eat the vegetables of the *Dakinis* and *Yoginis*[1]. I will snatch the string of skulls from them and make a sour broth with it.

I will make him understand well that I am Ramprasad, the son of Kali.

Whether it means spiritual disciplines or brings the death of the body, whatever it may be, I shall certainly do it.

"I was like one gone mad. Such madness results from deep longing."

Narendra sings –

O Mother, make me mad with Thy love.

What need is there for knowledge or reason?[2]

While listening to the song, Sri Ramakrishna again goes into samadhi.

When he comes down from the samadhi, he takes up the mood of Girirani[3] and sings the *agamani*[4] song. Says Girirani, "O residents of this place, has my Uma come?" Intoxicated with intense love, Thakur sings the song.

After the song, Sri Ramakrishna says to the devotees, "You see, it is the Mahashtami day. So the Mother has come! That is why I feel such an arousal of divine inspiration!"

Kedar — Lord, you yourself have come. There is no Mother other than you.

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[1] The spirits of destruction
[2] For complete song see Volume I, Section XII
[3] Wife of King Himalaya and mother of Uma
[4] Any of the songs about the coming of Uma, Shiva's wife, to her father's house

Thakur glances in another direction and begins to sing the following song in a casual manner –

O *sakhi*[1]! Where is He for whom I am going mad?

Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva have together broken Navadvip like mad gods.

And I have seen another mad person in Vrindavan who has made Radha his king and stands there in the garb of a police officer.

Another mad fellow I saw on the road to Navadvip carrying his love for Radha in his *kamandala*[2]. He roams about with it, saying, 'Here is nectar.'

Again going into an ecstatic mood, Thakur sings –

You are the river of nectar, O Mother Shyama! Who can fathom your various moods?[3]

While Thakur is singing the song, Vijay suddenly stands up and says, "Haribol, Haribol." Intoxicated with divine emotion, Sri Ramakrishna begins to dance with him and other devotees.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees

After the singing of devotional songs, Sri Ramakrishna, Vijay, Narendra and the other devotees sit down. All eyes are fixed on Thakur. It is not yet dusk. Thakur talks to them, making polite enquiries. Kedar folds his hands and in a most humble and sweet manner tells Thakur something. Narendra, Chunilal, Surendra, Ram, M. and Harish sit close to them.

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[1] The milkmaid friend of Radha

[2] Mendicant water pot

[3] For the full song see M. the Apostle and the Evangelist, Vol. 1, Section 13, Chapter 2

Kedar (very humbly, to Sri Ramakrishna) — How can I get rid of my dizziness?

Sri Ramakrishna (lovingly) — It does happen. I also had it. Apply some almond oil. They say it cures dizziness.

Kedar — I shall do that, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Chunilal) — I say, brother, how are you?

Chunilal — Everything is fine with me. Balaram Babu, Rakhal and the others are well in Vrindavan.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why did you send so much sandesh?

Chunilal — I have just come from Vrindavan, sir...

> Chunilal had accompanied Balaram to Vrindavan. He was there for several months. His vacation ended, he is now back in Calcutta.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Harish) — Wait a couple of days before you go to Dakshineswar. You fell ill there. The same could happen again.

(Lovingly to Narayan) "Come and sit near me. Come to Dakshineswar tomorrow and have your meal there. (Pointing at M.) Come with him. (To M.) What do you say?"

> M. wants to go to Dakshineswar with Thakur this very day. He becomes thoughtful. Surendra has been there for a long time. He went home once, but has come back and is now standing beside Thakur.

Surendra drinks liqour. He used to drink so much that Thakur had begun to worry about him. However, Sri Ramakrishna didn't ask him to give up drinking altogether. He said to him, "Look here, Surendra, whatever you drink, first offer to the Divine Mother. And take only so much that you are not dizzy and you do not stagger. When you actively keep your mind on the Divine Mother, you will develop some aversion to drinking. She is the source of *karanananda*[1]. When you attain Her, you feel a natural bliss."

Surendra is standing beside Sri Ramakrishna. Glancing at him, Thakur suddenly asks, "Have you been drinking wine?" Saying so, he goes into an ecstatic mood.

It is dusk. As he regains a little external awareness, Thakur repeats the Divine Mother's name and begins to sing happily –

The Mother is always lost in the ecstasy of joy in the company of Shiva.

Though drunk with nectar, She reels but does not fall.

Erect She stands on Shiva's bosom and the earth trembles under Her steps.

More than mad, both are indifferent to fear and shame.

It is already dusk. Sri Ramakrishna is uttering the name of Hari, clapping his hands in between. He chants in a sweet voice, "Haribol[2], Haribol, Harimaya, Haribol, Hari, Hari, Haribol."

And then he chants the name of Rama, "Rama, Rama, Rama! Rama, Rama, Rama! Rama, Rama."

Sri Ramakrishna's prayer – how to pray?

[1] Bliss of divine inebriation
[2] Repeat the name of Hari

Now Thakur prays –

"Oh, Rama! Oh, Rama! I am without bhajan[1], without sadhan (austerity), without devotion (bhakti), without ritualistic worship! I take refuge in You, oh Rama; in You I take refuge! I don't want creature comforts, oh Rama! Nor worldly esteem, nor the eight occult powers, nor even a hundred occult powers, oh Rama! I take refuge in You, Your refuge alone, oh Rama! Just grant that I may develop pure love for Your lotus feet, oh Rama! And may I never be deluded by your world-bewitching maya! Rama, my Rama! My refuge!"

While Sri Ramakrishna prays thus, everyone's eyes are fixed on him. Hearing his compassionate voice, many devotees shed tears.

Ram stands close by.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ram) — Ram, where were you?

Ram — Sir, I was upstairs.

Ram was upstairs arranging a feast for Thakur and the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling at Ram) — Isn't it better to stay at a lower level than to go up? Water collects on low ground, but it flows off higher levels.

Ram (laughing) — True, sir.

Leaf plates for dinner have been laid on the terrace. Ramachandra takes Thakur and the devotees to the terrace and makes them eat heartily. Sri Ramakrishna, then accompanied by Niranjan, M. and

[1] Singing of devotional songs

others, go to Adhar's house. The Mother of the Universe has arrived there – it is the Mahashtami day! Adhar had prayed especially that Thakur be present, for then alone would his worship be successful.

Section XVII

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees on Navami Puja Day in Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra, Bhavanath and others in Dakshineswar

Monday, 29 September, 1884, the Navami Puja[1] day. It is early morning. The *mangalarati*[2] of Mother Kali has already been performed. The *roshan chowki*[3] is playing the morning *raga ragini* (modes of Indian music) from the Nahabat. The gardeners with large wicker baskets in their hands and the brahmins with puja baskets are going to gather flowers for the worship of the Mother of Universe. Sri Ramakrishna has been awake since before dawn. Bhavanath, Baburam, Niranjan and M. stayed here last night. They slept on the verandah of Thakur's room. When they open their eyes, they see Thakur dancing in divine inebriation. He is uttering, "Victory, victory to Durga! Victory, victory to Durga!"

He is just a child! Without a dhoti around his waist, he dances, pacing the room and uttering the Divine Mother's name.

After awhile he says, "*Sahajananda*[4], *Sahajananda*." Then he repeats the name of Govinda, "Govinda, you are my life, my life breath."

The devotees are now awake. They watch Thakur intently in his ecstatic mood. Hazra is also

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[1] The third day of Durga Puja
[2] Waving of lights before the deity at dawn
[3] Symphony of sanai and other musical instruments
[4] The spontaneous joy of ecstasy

there. He is sitting on the verandah to the southeast of Thakur's room. And Latu is there. He renders personal service to Thakur. Rakhal is in Vrindavan these days. Narendra visits Sri Ramakrishna from time to time. He is to come today.

The devotees had slept on the small verandah to the north of Sri Ramakrishna's room. It is winter, so they had closed the wicker door. When they have finished washing their faces, Thakur comes and sits on a mat on the northern verandah. Bhavanath and M. are seated close to him. Other devotees come in from time to time and take their seats.

Jivakotis[1] are skeptics and *Ishvarakotis*[2] have unshakable faith

Sri Ramakrishna (to Bhavanath) — You know, *jivakotis* do not have faith easily. On the other hand, *Ishvarakotis* need no proof for their belief, they have unshakable faith. Prahlada began to weep suddenly when he wrote the letter 'K' because it reminded him of Krishna. The nature of the jiva is beset with doubts. He says, "Yes, it is so, no doubt, but ..."

"Hazra will never believe that Brahman and His Shakti (Power) are inseparable, that the Power and the Being possessing the Power are not different from each other. I call God Brahman when He is inactive. But when He creates, preserves and dissolves, I call Him Shakti. But the substance is one, it is indivisible. Think of fire and you are immediately reminded of its power to burn. Similarly, when you think of burning power, you are reminded of fire. You cannot think of one without thinking of the other.

"Then I prayed, 'Mother, Hazra tries to upset the belief of 'this place'[1]. Either give him the right

[1] Ordinary human beings
[2] Godmen

understanding, or take him away from here.' The very next day he came and said, 'I agree with you [that Brahman and Shakti are inseparable]!' He said, 'Vibhu (the All-pervading Being) exists everywhere.' "

Bhavanath (laughing) — Did you really feel disturbed at this idea of Hazra?

Sri Ramakrishna — My state has changed. I can no longer carry out discussions and arguments with people. I am not in the state of mind to discuss and argue with Hazra. Hriday[2] said to me in Jadu Mallick's garden, 'Uncle, don't you want to keep me with you?' I said, 'No, I am not in that state of mind. I can no longer get into arguments with you.'

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna in Kamarpukur – the world full of divine consciousness – childlike faith

"What is jnana and what is ajnana? It is ajnana (ignorance) when you think that the Lord is far away from you. When you know Him to be here [within you], that is jnana.

"When you have gained the right *jnana* (spiritual knowledge), everything seems to be full of divine consciousness. I used to talk to Shibu[3] when he was very small, four or five years old. He was in the countryside [Kamarpukur]. There was thunder and lightening in the clouds. Shibu said, 'Uncle, God is

[1] Thakur referred himself to 'this place'

[2] At that time Hriday was not allowed to enter the temple garden. He had displeased the proprietor of the garden. Hriday wanted Thakur to request the proprietor to hire him again. Hriday rendered a lot of personal service to Thakur, but he would speak harshly and reprimand him at the same time. Thakur was very tolerant of him.

[3] Shivaram, nephew of Thakur

striking flints!' (All laugh.) One day I saw him catching a grasshopper. The leaves of a nearby tree were shaking. He said to them, 'Be still, I have to catch the grasshopper.' The child was seeing divine consciousness in everything! The simple faith of a child! If you don't have childlike faith, you can't attain Bhagavan. Oh, what a state I was in! One day I was bitten in a meadow. I was afraid it might have been snake bite! What should I do? I had heard that if a snake bites a second time, it takes back its own poison. I began to look for it in the place I had been bitten, so that it might bite me again. Somebody asked me what I was doing. When I told him, he said it must bite in exactly the same place where it had bitten before. Hearing that, I got up. Perhaps it was a small scorpion that bit me.

"And one day I heard Ramlal say that autumn dew was good for one's health. So, coming by carriage from Calcutta, I stuck my head out of the window to be exposed to the dew. I fell ill after this." (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna and medicine

Thakur now goes into his room and takes his seat. Both of his feet are somewhat swollen. He asks the devotees to see whether a depression is formed on the skin when it is pressed. A small depression did form, but everybody told him that it was nothing.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Bhavanath) — Please ask Mahendra of Sinthi to come and see me. I will feel reassured if he says it is nothing.

Bhavanath (smiling) — You have great faith in medicine. We don't have so much.

Sri Ramakrishna — God makes the medicine and He Himself is the physician. Dr. Gangaprasad asked me

not to drink water at night. I stuck to it as if it were an injunction of the *Vedas*. I look upon him as Dhanavantri[1] himself.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra, Bhavanath and others – he goes into samadhi

Yesterday Thakur had gone to Calcutta on the Mahashtami day for the darshan of the image of the deity. He first visited Ram's house and later went to Adhar's for the darshan of the deity. A number of devotees had gathered there. When Thakur saw Narendra, he went into samadhi. He stretched his foot toward Narendra's knee and went into samadhi standing there.

Today Hazra comes in and takes his seat. After some casual conversation, Thakur says to him, "Look here, yesterday there were so many people at Ram's house – Vijay, Kedar and many others. Why do I feel such strong emotion when I see Narendra? I saw Kedar as the 'abode' [realm] of *karanananda* (joy of divine inebriation)."

In the meantime Narendra enters the room. Sri Ramakrishna is beside himself with joy. Having saluted him, Narendra talks with Bhavanath and others. M. is also there. A long mat covers the floor of the room. While talking, Narendra lies on the mat, flat on his stomach. Looking at Narendra, Thakur suddenly goes into samadhi. He sits on Narendra's back in this state of samadhi.

Bhavanath sings –

O Mother, ever blissful as Thou art,

Do not deprive me of bliss.

[1] The name of the physician of heaven

My mind knows nothing but Thy lotus feet[1].

Thakur comes out of his samadhi and sings –

You are the river of nectar, O Mother Shyama! Who can fathom your various moods?

Thakur sings another song –

Chant, chant, O my mind, the hallowed name of Durga,

Obeisance to You, Gauri. Obeisance to You, Narayani.

Only when You shower Your compassion on this sorrowing servant of Yours, shall I know Your greatness.

You, Yourself, are the dusk, the daytime and the night.

Sometimes You become man and sometimes a charming lady.

You hold the bow when You are Rama and the flute as Krishna.

With Your disheveled hair, You have captivated the heart of Shiva.

O Mother, You are the ten great powers. You, Yourself, are the ten avatars.

In what form are You incarnating to liberate me this time?

O Mother, Yashoda worshipped You with hibiscus flowers and vilwa leaves.

By placing Krishna in her lap, You fulfilled her heart's desire.

Where else do I live, O Mother, than in groves?

May my heart remain tied to Your red feet night and day!

[1] For complete song, see Section IV, Chapter III of this volume

I may die anywhere, I may die of any calamity, I must call out the hallowed name of Durga in my last moments.

If you ask me to go away, pray tell me, to whom shall I go?

O Mother! Who else has this nectar sweet name, Tara?

You may ask me to leave You, but I shall never do it.

O Mother! I will cling to Your feet and tinkle as the little bells of Your anklet.

When You sit with Shiva I shall tinkle at Your feet: Victory to Shiva, victory to Shiva!

If Your feet are scratched when I write Your name on them,

I shall write it on the ground so that You may place Your feet on it.

Mother, if You fly in the sky, becoming a kite, I shall live as a fish in water.

Pray, lift me from there with Your claws.

Hurt by Your claws, O All-Blissful Mother, when I quit this mortal frame,

Kindly grant me, then, both of Your red feet.

O Mother Kali, the beloved of Kala (the Absolute), take me across.

You have made a boat with Your two feet to liberate me.

You are Yourself heaven, the mortal world, and the nether world.

Hari, Brahma and the twelve Gopalas have all sprung from You.

You Yourself, are the Sarvamangala[1] of Golaka[2], the Katyayani[3] of Braja and the Mother Annapurna of the infinite forms of Kashi.

The one who treads the path uttering, 'Durga, Durga,' Shiva protects, holding his trident in hand.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna in the company of Narendra, Bhavanath and others – he goes into samadhi and dances

Hazra, seated on the northeastern verandah, is counting the beads of his rosary. Thakur comes and sits in front of him. He takes Hazra's rosary in his own hands. M. and Bhavanath are there with him. It is about ten o'clock.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Hazra) — Look, I cannot tell the beads of the rosary. No, no, perhaps I can. I can do it by holding the rosary in my left hand. But I cannot repeat the name of God.

Having said so, Thakur tries to repeat the Name on the rosary. But as soon as he starts, he passes into samadhi.

Thakur remains in samadhi for a long time, still holding the rosary. The devotees watch him, speechless with wonder. Hazra remains seated and also watches him wonderstruck. Thakur gains external consciousness after a long time. He exclaims, "I am feeling hungry." He often says this to bring his mind to the normal plane.

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[1] One who is the source of all good; an appellation of Goddess Durga
[2] Part of heaven which is the abode of Narayana
[3] A name of Goddess Durga

M. goes out to bring something for him to eat, but Thakur says, "No brother, I will first go to the Kali Temple."

Sri Ramakrishna performs Kali Puja on the Navami puja day

Thakur goes south toward the Kali Temple via the brick courtyard. On the way he pays obeisance to Shiva in the twelve temples. The Radhakanta temple is to his left. He then goes there and offers his obeisance. Reaching the Kali Temple, he salutes the Mother. He takes a seat and offers flowers at Her lotus feet. He also offers flowers to his own head. When leaving, he says to Bhavanath, "Take these articles with you – the green coconut offered to the Mother and the holy *charanamrita*." Thakur then returns to his room with M. and Bhavanath. As soon as he reaches his room, he offers obeisance to Hazra. 'What are you doing, sir?' Hazra cries out as he rises. He asks, "What is this?"

Sri Ramakrishna says, "Why, is something wrong?"

Hazra often argues with Thakur that the Lord indeed exists in everybody and that everybody can attain Brahmajnana by the practice of spiritual disciplines.

It is mealtime. The bells for the arati and food offering to the deities have rung. All the brahmins, Vaishnavas and indigents go toward the guest house to have Mother's prasad and that of Radhakanta. The devotees will also partake of the Mother's prasad, seated where the brahmin employees of the guest house sit for their meals. Thakur says, "Everyone must go and eat there. What do you say? (To Narendra) No. You eat here."

"All right, Narendra and I will eat here." Bhavanath, Baburam, M. and the others leave for the guest house.

After taking some prasad, Thakur rests awhile – though not for long. The devotees are talking on the verandah. Thakur joins them and is happy in their company. It is two o'clock. They are all seated on the northeastern verandah. Suddenly Bhavanath appears from the southeastern verandah in the garb of a brahmachari. He is in ochre cloth, *kamandala* in hand, and is smiling. Thakur and all the devotees laugh.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — This shows the state of his mind. That is why he is dressed this way.

Narendra — He is in the garb of a brahmachari. I would like to put on the garb of a *vamachari* (practitioner of Tantrik rituals). (Laughter.)

Hazra — You have to procure the five ingredients: wine, meat, fish, posture and women, and the mystic circle [of Bhairavis].

Sri Ramakrishna does not comment on *vamachara*[1]. He does not encourage this practice. In fact, he ~~laughed~~ laughs it away. He begins to dance like one intoxicated. He sings –

I shall not be distracted even if You make me forget.
The reason? I have had the vision of Your red feet.

His earlier story – Rajnarayan's Chandi – Nakur Acharya's song

Thakur says, "Oh, how beautiful is Rajnarayan's singing of the Chandi! He sings and dances in the same way. And the songs of Nakur Acharya in our village! Ah, what dance! What music!"

A sadhu has arrived in the Panchavati. He is a hot-headed man. He uses foul language with anybody

[1] Practice of Tantrik rituals in collaboration with a woman

and everybody, and hurls curses. He comes in wearing wooden sandals.

He asks, "Can I get fire here?" Sri Ramakrishna folds his hands to salute the sadhu and remains standing in this posture till he leaves.

When the sadhu has gone, Bhavanath says, "How devoted you are to sadhus!"

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — You see, he too is Narayana, though a man of tamas. This is how one should treat people of tamasic nature. Besides, he is a sadhu!

Sri Ramakrishna and game of golakdham – 'the right person is victorious everywhere'

The devotees are playing the game of *golakdham*[1]. Hazra is also playing. Thakur comes in and stands there looking at them. The pawns of M. and Kishori reach 'heaven'. Sri Ramakrishna pays obeisance to both of them. He adds, "Both of you brothers[2] are blessed." (Aside to M.) "Don't play this game any more." Thakur continues to watch the game as Hazra's pawn reaches 'hell'. Sri Ramakrishna says, "What is the matter with Hazra? Yet again!"

In other words, Hazra's pawn has again entered 'hell'. Everyone giggles and laughs.

When all seven dice fall straight, Latu's pawn is completely out of the '*samsar*' (the world). Latu begins to dance with joy. Thakur says, "Just see how happy Latu is! He would have been very sad if that

[1] A kind of indoor game in which each player tries to get into heaven and on a false step falls into hell.

[2] Kishori was initiated by Sri Ramakrishna. He left his mortal frame exactly one year before M. He was a beloved of the sannyasin disciples of Thakur. Especially Swami Subodhananda and Swami Shivananda loved him. During his last years, he lived alone.

hadn't happened. (Alone to the devotees) It has its own significance. Hazra has the conceit that he will win here – but the law of the Lord is such that He does not insult a righteous person. The righteous man is victorious everywhere!"

Chapter IV

Sadhana with women not for Narendra and his like – *vamachara* criticized

His earlier story – visit to holy places – mystic circle of Bhairavis in Kashi – Sri Ramakrishna in the attitude of a child

Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the smaller cot in his room. Narendra, Bhavanath, Baburam and M. are sitting on the floor. Narendra refers to the Tantrik sects of Ghoshpara, Panchanami and others. Thakur describes their practices and condemns them. He says, "They can't follow spiritual practices correctly. They just satisfy sensual desires in the name of religion."

(To Narendra) "You need not listen to their practices."

"The Bhairavas and Bhairavis are like them. Once when I went to Kashi, they took me to a Bhairavi[1] mystic circle – every Bhairava[2] was with a Bhairavi. I was asked to drink wine. I said, 'Mother, I cannot touch wine.' Then they began to drink. I thought perhaps they would begin japa and meditation. But they didn't. Instead they began to dance. I began to fear that they might fall into the Ganges. Their circle was made on the bank of the Ganges.

[1] A female aspirant of the Tantrik sect
[2] A male aspirant of the Tantrik sect

"Great respect is shown to husband and wife if they take up the role of Bhairava and Bhairavi.

(To Narendra and other devotees) "Do you know what my attitude is? I have a filial nature, the attitude of a son toward his mother. Regarding a woman as mother is a very pure attitude. There is no danger in it. Considering a woman as sister is not inferior. But looking on a woman as one's mistress, the attitude of a 'hero,' is beset with difficulties. Tarak's father used to practice this rite. It is a very difficult path. It is impossible to maintain the correct spirit in this path.

"There are different ways to reach the Lord. As many faiths, so many paths. It's like going to the Kali temple on different roads. Even so, some paths are pure, while others are dirty. One must take a pure path.

"I have seen so many faiths, so many paths. Now I don't like them anymore – they just argue with each other. However, you who are with me are my own. I tell you, I have reached the conclusion that He is the whole, while I am a part of Him; He is the Master, I am His servant; and sometimes I feel that I am He and He is me."

The devotees listen to Thakur in deep silence.

Sri Ramakrishna and love of mankind

Bhavanath (humbly) — When you don't get along well with a person, your mind becomes disturbed. Then you can't love everybody.

Sri Ramakrishna — First talk it out with that person. Try to make up with him. If you fail in your efforts, don't worry. Take refuge in God and meditate on Him. There is no need to give up God and feel depressed because of other people.

Bhavanath — Christ and Chaitanya both said to love everyone.

Sri Ramakrishna — Love you must, for God abides in all. But when you come across a wicked person, salute him from a distance. Chaitanya Deva did the same thing. He would restrain his spiritual feelings in the presence of those of a different nature. At Srivas's home, he forced Srivas's mother-in-law out of the room, dragging her by the hair.

Bhavanath — She was turned out by somebody else.

Sri Ramakrishna — Could anybody do it without his [Chaitanya Deva's] consent? What else to do if the two minds don't agree? Should one keep worrying about it the whole night? The mind, which should be given to God, should not be wasted in futile things. I say, 'Mother, I want none – neither Narendra, nor Bhavanath, nor Rakhal. Only You do I want. What use is a man to me?"

> When Mother Chandi arrives in the house, I will hear any number of hymns in Her praise.
>
> And any number of ascetics, yogis and sadhus with matted locks will come as well.

"Having attained Her, I shall have attained everything. Coins are clods of earth, and clods of earth are coins. Gold is clay and clay is gold – saying this, I gave them all up. I threw them into the Ganges. Then I began to fear that Mother Lakshmi might be angry with me because I had disregarded her glory. Lest She should stop giving me food, I said, 'Mother, I only want You and nothing else.' Having attained Her, I shall attain all."

Bhavanath (smiling) — This is astute calculation!

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Yes, only that much calculation!

"Bhagavan appeared before a certain person and said, 'I am very pleased with your penance. Ask me for a boon.' The aspirant said, 'Bhagavan, if you are granting me a boon, then please grant that I may eat on a gold plate with my grandson.' So much was accomplished in one boon! He became wealthy, begot a son, and then a grandson."

Chapter V

Lord is the refuge – Sri Ramakrishna's devotion to his mother – in the joy of devotional songs

The devotees are in the room while Hazra is seated on the verandah.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you know what Hazra wants? He needs some money. His family is in distress. He is in debt. That is why he practices japa and meditation – to get some money.

A Devotee — Can't God fulfill a devotee's desire?

Sri Ramakrishna — If it is God's will. But the Lord doesn't take all the burden of a person unless he is intoxicated by intense love for Him. Someone holds a child by the hand and makes him sit for his meal at a feast. Who does so in the case of old people? When one

meditates on Him and cannot take care of himself, the Lord then takes responsibility for him[1].

"He [Hazra] does not enquire about his family. Hazra's son said to Ramlal, 'Ask my father to come home. We shall not ask him for anything.' Hearing this, I began to weep."

Life of Sri Ramakrishna spoken with his own holy lips – visit to Vrindavan

"Hazra's mother said to Ramlal, 'Ask Pratap to come home and ask your uncle [Sri Ramakrishna] in my name to send Pratap.' I asked him to go, but he didn't listen.

"How great is one's mother! How long Chaitanya Deva had to implore his mother before he was allowed to leave family life. Sachi [Chaitanya Deva's mother] said, 'I will cut Keshab Bharati[2] asunder!' Chaitanya Deva had to beseech her to give her approval for his sannyasa. He said, 'Mother, if you don't approve of it, I won't go. But if you keep me at home, I shall not survive. Besides, mother, you will be able to see me whenever you remember me. I shall not be far from you. And I will come to see you every now and then.' It was only then that Sachi permitted him to leave.

"As long as his mother was alive, Narada could not leave her to practice austerities. He had to take care of her, you see. It was only after her death that Narada went away to practice spiritual disciplines in order to realize Hari.

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[1] Persons who meditate on Me, worship Me in all beings, never harbouring any other thought, to them thus ever zealously engaged, I carry what they lack and preserve what they already have. (Gita 9:22)

[2] The guru of Chaitanya Deva who initiated him into sannyasa

"When I was at Vrindavan I did not want to return. It was arranged for me to stay with Gangama[1]. She had her bedding on one side of the room, and mine was on the other. I resolved not to return to Calcutta. 'How long must I eat Kaivarta's [proprietors of Dakshineswar temple, who belong to the low caste of fishermen] food?' I asked myself. But Hriday said, 'No, you must return to Calcutta.' He pulled me one way and Gangama dragged me the other. I had a great desire to stay on with her. Suddenly, however, the thought of my mother came to me. My whole attitude changed immediately. 'My mother is old now,' I said to myself. 'If I keep worrying about her, how can I meditate on the Lord? I would rather return to her. There I will meditate on the Lord with a free mind.'

(To Narendra) "You, too, please ask Hazra to go home. The other day he said he would go and stay there for three days. But he did nothing about it.

(To the devotees) "Today we talked of Ghoshpara and such Tantrik ways. Govinda! Govinda! Govinda! Let us now utter the name of Lord Hari. Let there be some cheese pudding after the dish of lentils."

Narendra sings –

O my mind! Rest assured that there is the stainless Primal Purusha.

He is the beginningless Truth and cause of all causes. He pervades the moving and the unmoving world as *prana* (vital breath).

He is ever living, resplendent, the haven of all. The man of faith alone beholds Him.

He is beyond the senses, the eternal, the essence of consciousness, and dwells in the cave of the hearts of all.

[1] A great woman saint of Vrindavan

He is adorned by the different qualities of jnana and prema. Man is rid of all grief by meditating on Him.

He has numberless qualities, He is of ever-serene countenance. None can reach His depths.

But He reveals Himself by His grace to those who take shelter at His feet, knowing them to be humble and helpless by His grace.

Ever-forgiving and the source of all good, He is ever the giver of help in the sea of sorrows.

He is ever just and He bestows fruit in accordance with our good and bad deeds.

He is the most loving, the ocean of mercy and the treasure house of grace. By hearing of His glories one's eyes are filled with tears.

Behold Him and be blessed. He is the haven of all hungry hearts.

Wonderful is His nature, of peerless beauty without stain, which no human speech can describe.

O my brother! Become a beggar at His door and worship Him alone day and night.

Song 2 –

The full moon of divine love rises on the firmament of divine wisdom.[1]

Thakur is dancing round and round. The others are also singing and dancing. It is a mart of joy. The song ended, Thakur begins to sing again.

Song 3 –

The Mother is always lost in the ecstasy of joy in the company of Shiva.

[1] For complete song refer Section I, Chapter II of this volume

Though drunk with nectar, She reels but does not fall.

Erect, She stands on Shiva's bosom, and the earth trembles under Her steps.

More than mad, both are indifferent to fear and shame.

Thakur is very happy to see that M. has joined in the music. When the song ends, Thakur says to M. with a smile, "It has been so nice. Had there been a drummer, it would have been much more intense. It would have sounded: Tak tak ta dhina, dak dak da dhina."

The singing of devotional songs ends at dusk.

Section XVIII

Sri Ramakrishna at Adhar's House – enjoys Devotional Songs with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna with Vijay, Kedar, Baburam and other devotees

Kedar, Vijay, Baburam, Narayan, M. and Vaishnavcharan

It is Wednesday, 1 October, 1884, the eleventh day of the bright fortnight of Aswin. Accompanied by Narayan and Gangadhar, Thakur has come to Adhar's house from Dakshineswar. On the way he had suddenly passed into ecstasy and said, "That I should count the beads! Away with that! This emblem of Shiva has sprung up from the earth by itself."

Sri Ramakrishna has reached Adhar's house. A number of devotees have gathered there: Kedar, Vijay, Baburam and many others. Vaishnavcharan, the musician, has arrived. As directed by Thakur, every day when he returns home from office, Adhar listens to Vaishnavcharan's kirtan. Vaishnavcharan sings very sweetly. Today he is going to sing. When Thakur enters Adhar's drawing room, all the devotees rise and take the dust of his feet. After he has taken his seat with a smiling face, the devotees also sit down. When Kedar and Vijay have bowed to him, Thakur asks Narayan and Baburam to pay obeisance to them. He asks Kedar and Vijay to bless the two young boys so that they may gain love for God. Pointing to Narayan, he says, "He is very open

and guileless." The devotees gaze at Baburam and Narayan.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Kedar and other devotees) — I just happened to meet you on the way. Had I not, you would have reached the Kali Temple by now. It is by the Lord's grace that we met beforehand.

Kedar (humbly, folding his hands) — The Lord's will! It is indeed your will.

Thakur laughs.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna in the joy of kirtan with the devotees

The kirtan begins. Vaishnavcharan sings a love tryst, ending it with a *rasa* (play of Radha and the milkmaids) kirtan. Just as the kirtan depicting the meeting of Radha and Krishna begins, Thakur dances, filled with divine love. The devotees also sing and dance, forming a circle around him. After the singing is over, everybody sits down.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vijay) — He sings beautifully.

Saying this, he points at Vaishnavcharan and asks him to sing the song beginning with 'The beautiful Gauranga.' Vaishnavcharan sings –

The beautiful and youthful Gauranga of golden hue is the best dancer.

When the song ends, Thakur says to Vijay, "How did you like it?" Vijay says, "It was wonderful!" Now Thakur himself begins to sing about the divine emotion of Gauranga –

Surely Gauranga would be in ecstasy.

What else can he who is the treasure house of ecstasy have?

He laughs, weeps and dances, surcharged with divine emotion.

Seeing a forest, he thinks of it as Vrindavan. Seeing the sea, he thinks it to be the Jamuna.

He who has Krishna within and Gaur without surely will have ecstasy.

Gaur sobs and weeps. He holds his own foot and says:

Where are you, Radha, full of ecstatic love?

Mani sings along with him.

Thakur's song ends and Vaishnavcharan sings again –

O my Vina[1], play Hari, Hari!

Without Hari's compassion, you will not gain the Supreme Essence.

The name of Hari destroys all sorrows. Chant 'Hare Krishna, Hare'.

By Hari's will you will have no worry!

O Vina, utter but once the name of Hari. There is no haven except the name of Hari.

The servant, Govinda, says, 'Days are passing. Don't be drowned in distress.'

Thakur sings the different tunes emulating the musician. He says to Vaishnavcharan, "Sing this way, like professional musicians."

Vaishnavcharan sings –

O my tongue, always repeat the name of Sri Durga.

Who else can save you from danger but Sri Durga.

[1] A stringed musical instrument

The boat of Durga's name sails on the lake of faith to take you across the sea of the world.

By practicing the instructions of the compassionate Guru, your boat reaches the bank.

If you were to say that the six enemies in the form of wind will create a storm around your boat,

Rest assured that the boat of Durga's name will reach the bank even in the storm, since it is piloted by Mrityunjay (Shiva, the immortal one).

O Mother, You are heaven, You are the mortal world, and You are the nether world.

It is from You that Hari, Brahma, the twelve Gopalas, the ten great sciences, and the ten avatars have sprung.

You will have to take me across this time, taking up one form or the other.

You are the moving and the unmoving. You are the gross and the subtle.

You are creation, preservation and dissolution. You are the root of the universe.

You are the Mother of the three worlds and their savior.

You are the Shakti (Power) of all and You are Your own Shakti too.

Thakur and the musician sing again and again the following lines of the song –

You are the moving and the unmoving. You are the gross and the subtle.

You are creation, preservation and dissolution. You are the root of the universe.

You are the Mother of the three worlds and their savior.

You are the Shakti (Power) of all and You are Your own Shakti too.

The musician starts another song –

Air, darkness, the void, the firmament, the ten quarters of the globe and all directions have come into existence by receiving Your light.

All the immortal ones including Brahma and Vishnu have taken their bodies because of the light of Your Shakti.

The Ida[1], the Pingala[2], the Sushumna[3], the Vajra, the Chitrini[4] are all pulsating because of the Sahasrara[5].

Rows and rows of lotuses are in the middle and the upper regions of Chitrini.

There is white and golden lightening.

Two lotuses are open, one is still in bud.

There are two couples upward facing and downward facing.

Mother, You, in the shape of a swan, are moving as the Kundalini in the lotus.

Above is the naval chakra called Manipura[6].

On it is the blood-red lotus of ten petals.

In this lotus dwells Your fire power.

When this fire is taken away, everything is extinguished.

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[1] The spiritual column on the left side of the spine

[2] The spiritual column on the right side of the spine

[3] The spiritual canal situated in the center of the spinal cord and extending from the base of the spine to the brain. It is through the Sushumna that the Kundalini rises.

[4] Vajra and Chitrini are two *nadis* (spiritual columns), Sushumna has Vajra inside it and Chitrini is within the latter. Chitrini's lustre is Om and it is subtle as a spider's thread; it pierces all the lotuses of the Sushumna. Within Chitrini is the Brahman-nadi, the channel along which the Kundalini passes.

[5] Thousand-petalled lotus in the cerebrum, the abode of Shiva

[6] The third centre in the Sushumna

In the lotus of the heart is the inward lake like the sky, on which floats the Anahata lotus.

There, is the gold-coloured, twelve-petalled, lotus-shaped arrow of Shiva.

In that lotus your Shakti lives as *jiva* and *prana*.

Above that, in the throat, is the Vishuddha lotus of sixteen petals, of the colour of smoke.

In this lotus Your Shakti lives as ether.

When ether is reached, the whole of ether becomes one unbounded space.

Above it is the thousand-petalled lotus within the cerebrum.

This is the most secret spot of the Guru.

It is in this lotus that the Supreme Shiva is present in His universal form.

He dwells alone in this white, thousand-petalled lotus.

It is in this lotus that Shiva is in the form of a shadow.

Shiva casts His reflection in the Brahmarandra[1]. When you reach there, Shiva becomes His own form.

There, You enjoy Yourself happily with Shiva.

When the merrymaking is over, Shiva takes the form of a reflection.

[1] The spiritual opening at the top of the head through which yogis say the soul leaves the body when merged with the Absolute

Chapter III

About God with form and God without form with Vijay and other devotees – mound of sugar

Kedar and some of the devotees stand up. They are going home. Kedar salutes Thakur and says, "Well, I take your leave now."

Sri Ramakrishna — Are you going back home without telling Adhar? That would be impolite.

Kedar — 'When God is pleased, everyone is satisfied'. When you stay, we all in a sense stay. But I am not feeling well. I am particularly uncomfortable when there is talk of marriage and worldly conventions. There are social obligations[1]. I had some trouble before.

Vijay — You are leaving him [Thakur] here ...

Just at this moment, Adhar arrives to take Thakur in to eat. Leaf plates have been laid inside. Thakur rises and says to Vijay and Kedar, "Come on. Come with me." Vijay, Kedar and other devotees sit with Thakur and partake of the prasad.

After eating, Thakur again goes to the drawing room and takes his seat. He is surrounded by Kedar, Vijay and other devotees.

Kedar makes a submission and apologizes – Vijay has vision of the gods

Folding his hands, Kedar says to Thakur very humbly, "Please pardon me for hesitating to eat here." Perhaps he thinks to himself, "If Thakur has

[1] Kedar was a brahmin, while Adhar belonged to a lower caste. Due to social obligations, Kedar did not want to eat at Adhar's home.

eaten here, certainly a lowly person like me should not have hesitated to eat!"

Kedar works in Dacca. A number of devotees visit him there and bring sandesh and other sweets for him. It is this that Kedar humbly discusses with Sri Ramakrishna.

Kedar (humbly) — Many people bring me things to eat. Tell me, oh Lord, what is your command?

Sri Ramakrishna — Even if a devotee is a *chandala* (pariah), you can take food from him. For seven years I was in a state of God-intoxication. When I went to my native village [Kamarpukur], what a state I was in! I even ate from the hands of a public woman. But now I can't do that.

Kedar (in a sweet voice, before leaving) — Lord, transmit your power to me. So many people visit me! What do I know?

Sri Ramakrishna — It will come about, brother! It does come when you are a sincere seeker of the Lord.

Before Kedar leaves, Yogendra, the editor of the Bangavasi [a Bengali paper], enters. He salutes Thakur and takes his seat.

They talk about God with form and God without form.

Sri Ramakrishna — God is with form and He is formless. How much more He is, we do not know. It will not do to say that He is formless.

Yogendra — There is a wonderful thing about the Brahmo Samaj. Even a boy of twelve sees the formless God. But in the Adi Brahmo Samaj, they don't object

very much to God with form. They even attend worship at the houses of rich men.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — He has beautifully said that even he (a boy of twelve) sees the formless God.

Adhar — Shivanath Babu does not accept God with form.

Vijay — That is his mistake. As he [Thakur] says, the chameleon is sometimes this colour and at other times a different colour. He who lives under the tree understands it correctly. During meditation, I saw a movie – several gods saying many different things. I said to myself, 'I shall go to him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] and request him to explain.'

Sri Ramakrishna — You had the right vision.

Kedar — The devotee accepts God with form. The devotee sees God with a form in his intense love for Him. Dhruva had the vision of Bhagavan and said to Him, 'Why don't your earrings move?' Bhagavan said, 'They will move if you touch them.'

Sri Ramakrishna — You must accept all these, brother – God with form and God without form. I was meditating in the Kali Temple when I saw Ramani, a prostitute. I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, You have this form too!' That is why I say you must accept all. You can never tell when She may appear before you in any form She likes.

Saying so, Thakur begins to sing.

A God-inspired mendicant has arrived...

Vijay — God has infinite power. Can He not reveal Himself in one particular form? How amazing! All these people who are a speck of the dust of His feet try to know all about Him!

Sri Ramakrishna — People read a little of the *Gita*, or the *Bhagavata*, or the *Vedanta* and conclude that they have understood everything. An ant went to a mound of sugar. One grain of sugar filled its stomach. It took another grain in its mouth and returned home, saying to itself, "I shall bring the whole mound next time." (All laugh.)

Section XIX

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees in Dakshineswar

Chapter I

With Vedantavagish, Ishan and other devotees in Dakshineswar

It is Saturday, 11 October, 1884. Sri Ramakrishna is lying on the smaller bedstead of his room in the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar. It is about two o'clock. Priya Mukherji and M. are seated on the floor.

Having left the school at one o'clock, M. has just reached the Kali Temple, at about two.

Sri Ramakrishna — I went to Jadu Mallick's house. Right away he asked me, 'How much is the carriage fare?' When somebody said, 'Three rupees, two annas,' he came to me and enquired about it. Next he secretly asked the coachman who was standing behind Shukul Thakur. The coachman said, 'Three rupees, four annas.' (General laughter.) Jadu ran to us again and asked, 'How much did you say the fare was?'

"A broker visited Jadu. He said to him, 'There is a parcel of four *kathas*[1] of land in Burrabazar for sale. Would you like to purchase it?' Jadu asked, 'What is the price? Can you bring it down?' I said, 'You are not a serious buyer. You are just asking to while away time. Isn't that true?' He turned to me and laughed. This is the way with worldly people. They want people to come to them so they will be known in the marketplace.

[1] A measure of unit equivalent to 320 sq. cubits

"Jadu had been to Adhar's house. I told him, 'Adhar was delighted that you went to his house.' Jadu said, 'What? Really? Was he really very pleased?'

"A certain Mallick went to Jadu's house. I could see from his eyes how clever and deceitful he was. Looking him straight in the eye, I said to him, 'It's not good to be too clever. The crow is a very clever bird, but it eats excreta of others and dies.' I also saw that he was wretched and not well off. Speechless with wonder, Jadu's mother asked me, 'Baba (father), how did you know all this, that he had nothing?' I knew it by looking at his face."

Narayan arrives. He sits on the floor.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Priyanath) — Well, your Hari is a fine person.

Priyanath — He is all right, but not particularly good. He does have a childlike nature.

Narayan — He addresses his wife as mother.

Sri Ramakrishna — How is that possible? Even I can't do that! He calls her mother! (To Priyanath) You see, he is a very calm boy. And his mind is directed toward God.

Now Thakur takes up other topics of conversation.

"Do you know what Hem said? He said to Baburam that God alone is the Reality and all else an illusion. (All laugh.) No, brother, he meant it. He told me that he would take me to his house and sing devotional songs. But he didn't. Later he said, 'If I take up drums and cymbals, what will people say?' He became frightened that people might think he was crazy."

The Ghoshpara ladies look on Haripada as Gopala[1] – dispassion since youth and women

"Haripada has come under the influence of a Ghoshpara woman who doesn't leave him alone. He said, 'She takes me on her lap and feeds me, as if I were Gopala.' I cautioned him that such a filial attitude brings about a downfall.

"You know, even if one has attained Bhagavan, one should keep a distance from women. And it is extremely harmful to frequent women of bad motives and be fed by them. They rob you of spirituality.

"You can safeguard your love of God only by being very cautious. Bhavanath, Rakhal and others once cooked their own food. They had just started eating when a baul[2] came and sat with them, saying that he would also like to eat. I said, 'There is not enough to eat, but if anything is left, we will keep it for you.' This angered him and he left. On the Vijaya festival day people allow anybody to feed them with their own hands. It is not right. You must only eat from the hands of a pure devotee.

"You must be very cautious about women. Don't listen to them when they display their Gopala bhava (motherly attitude toward a boy) to you. There is the proverb: 'A woman can devour even the three worlds.' When some women see an attractive young man, they set various kinds of snares to trap him. And this they call their Gopala bhava!

"They who have felt dispassion since their youth, they who wander about yearning for Bhagavan, they who have not entered family life, indeed belong to a separate class. They are pure aristocrats. In their deep

[1] Baby Krishna
[2] Mendicant minstrels of Vaishnava sect

dispassion they remain fifty cubits away from women lest the latter should bring a change in their attitude. If, however, they fall into the clutches of a woman, they no longer remain blue-blooded. Their attitude changes and they come down to a lower level of spirituality. They who have the right kind of dispassion from an early age belong to a higher spiritual ideal ('abode'). They have an extremely pure attitude. They never allow a single stain to touch them."

How to conquer the senses – practice of sadhana in the attitude of woman

"How can one conquer the senses? One should assume the feminine attitude. For a long time, I had the attitude of a maidservant of God. I used to dress myself like a woman and wore jewelry and a scarf on my head. I would perform arati with my head covered. Had I not, how could I have kept my wife with me for eight months? Both of us were the maid companions of the Divine Mother!

"I couldn't say that I was a male. One day I was in an ecstatic state when she [the Holy Mother] asked me, 'How do you think of me?' I replied, 'As the All-blissful Mother.'

"There is a sect which believes that whoever has breasts like a woman is a woman. Arjuna and Krishna did not have womanly breasts. Do you know the attitude in which Shiva is worshipped? The worship of the Shivalinga (the emblem of Shiva) is the worship of Mother's genital organ and that of the Father[1]. When a devotee worships it, he prays, 'Lord, please grant that I am not born again. That I may not again have to pass through a mother's womb after the union of semen and blood.' "

[1] Motherhood (or Shakti) and Fatherhood (or Brahman)

Chapter II

Sadhana in the company of women – Sri Ramakrishna prohibits it again and again

Sri Ramakrishna is talking of the feminine attitude. Priya Mukherji, M. and some other devotees are there. In the meantime a tutor from Tagore's family comes in with a number of boys of Devendra Nath Tagore's family.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Sri Krishna has a peacock feather on his head. The feather bears the emblem of the female sex. It means that Sri Krishna is carrying Prakriti[1] on his head.

"When Krishna danced with the gopis, he assumed the attitude of a woman (prakriti). That is why he is seen dressed as a woman in the rasa[2]. If you don't have the feminine attitude, you have no right to be in the company of women. Only when one assumes the feminine attitude, can one participate in rasa and enjoy women's company. However, the *sadhaka* (aspirant) must be very cautious. He should remain far away from women. He should not associate frequently even with a woman of great devotion. When you are climbing up onto the roof, you must not sway. If you are unsteady, there is a danger of falling. The weak should hold onto a support when they climb.

"But it is different in the state of a *siddha* (man of spiritual perfection). There is no danger after one has attained Bhagavan's vision. One becomes fearless to a great extent. Once you have reached the roof, you have reached the goal; you can dance there. But you must not dance on the steps. And he who has climbed up to the

[1] Female principle of God
[2] Festival of dancing of Krishna with Radha and the gopis

roof, no longer needs to renounce what he formerly renounced. The roof is made of bricks, lime and brick dust; the steps are made of the same material. After the vision of Bhagavan, one realizes that the body of the woman about whom he had to be so cautious is the body of Bhagavati (Mother of the Universe). Thereafter he worships her as the Mother and there is no great risk of falling.

"One mustn't forget that when you have once touched the Grand-dame (in the game of hide and seek), you are free to do what you like."

The yoga of dhyana (meditation) and Sri Ramakrishna – looking outwardly and inwardly

"When a man's mind is turned outward, he sees the gross and his mind dwells in the *annamaya kosha*. Next is the subtle body. When the mind functions in the subtle body, it dwells in the *manomaya kosha* and *vijnanamaya kosha*. Next comes the *karana* (casual) body. When the mind goes to the causal body, there is only bliss – the mind dwells in the *anandamaya kosha*. It is the same as the semiconscious state of Chaitanya Deva.

"Next the mind is merged – it vanishes – in *Mahakarana* (the Great Cause). When the mind vanishes, there is no more news of it. This is the inmost state which Chaitanya Deva experienced.

"Do you know what that inmost state is? Sri Dayananda said, 'Come into the inner apartment and shut the door!' But not everybody can go inside the inner apartment.

"I used to correlate this with the flame of a lamp. I would think of the flame's red colour as gross. The white inner part, I would think of as subtle. And the

innermost black part, I named the *karana* (body of ecstasy).

"There are signs that one is meditating correctly. One of the signs is that a bird will sit on your head, thinking you are an inert object."

His earlier story – first meeting with Keshab in 1864, Keshab in meditation – one can also meditate with eyes open

"I saw Keshab for the first time in the Adi (Brahmo) Samaj. Several people were sitting on the dais. Keshab was in the middle. He was motionless, like a log of wood. I said to Mathur Babu, 'Look at his float. The fish has eaten the bait.' Because of his power of meditation he achieved all that he desired (name, fame and so forth) through the grace of the Lord.

"One can also meditate with eyes open. And it is also possible while talking. Imagine the painful twinge of a toothache!"

The Tutor from the house of Tagore — Yes sir, I know it quite well. (Laughter.)

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — When you have a toothache you attend to all your duties, but your mind remains attached to the toothache. In similar fashion, you can meditate with your eyes open – and also while talking.

The Tutor — God's name is the redeemer of the fallen, so I feel reassured. He is compassionate.

His earlier story – conversation with the Sikhs and Krishnadas

Sri Ramakrishna — The Sikhs also said that God was merciful. I asked them, 'How is He merciful?' They answered, 'Why Maharaj, God has created us as human beings. He provides us with everything, and He protects us from danger at every step.' I rejoined, 'How is He great to create us, rear us and then feed us? If you have a son, will people from Vamanpara[1] look after him?'

The Tutor — Sir, some people succeed spiritually in no time, while others do not. How do you explain that?

Dispassion of Lala Babu[2] and Rani Bhavani – sattva guna results from samskaras[3]

Sri Ramakrishna — You know, one succeeds spiritually to a large extent as the result of the *samskaras* of the previous life. But people think it takes place all of a sudden.

"Somebody drank a bottle of wine in the morning. He began to stagger and behave like a mad man. People were surprised that a bottle should turn one's head so much. Then somebody said, 'Let me tell you, he has been drinking the whole night.'

"Hanuman set fire to the golden city of Lanka. People were amazed that a monkey could burn the whole city. But later they said that it was the sigh of Sita and the wrath of Rama which burnt everything.

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[1] Meaning people from another part of town; it is an another locality

[2] Lala Babu, the pride of Bengal, was Krishna Chandra Singh of Pikepara. He developed dispassion (vairagya) in his youth. He had an estate yielding seven lakhs of rupees annually. At the age of thirty, he renounced all his possessions and went to live in Mathura. In his fortieth year, he took to the life of holy begging. He died at the age of forty-two. His wife, Rani Katyayani, was childless. His guru was Krishnadas Babaji, the translator of Bhaktamala into Bengali.

[3] Tendencies inherited from one's past births

"And then look at Lala Babu, a very wealthy man. Unless one has good samskaras from a previous birth, can one have such dispassion as Lala Babu? And Rani Bhavani! Though a woman, she possessed such spiritual knowledge and love of God!"

Rajas in Krishnadas – doing good to the world

"In one's last birth one is endowed with sattva guna[1] and one's mind is attached to Bhagavan. One feels a deep longing for Him and the mind rejects worldly experiences.

"Krishnadas Pal came here. I saw that he had rajas[2] prominent in him. Since he was a Hindu, he took his shoes off outside. After a short conversation with him, I realized that there was not much substance in him. I asked him what he thought the duty of a man was. He said, 'Doing good to the world.' I said, 'Who are you that you can do good to the world? Is the world so small that you can do good to it?' "

Thakur is overjoyed to see Narayan. He makes him sit beside him on the smaller cot and pats him affectionately. He gives him some sweets to eat and says lovingly, "Will you have some water?" Narayan is a student at M.'s school. At home he was beaten for visiting Thakur. Thakur says tenderly to him with a smile, "Get a long leather jacket made for yourself. Then you won't feel the blows."

Thakur says to Harish, "I would like to smoke the hubble-bubble."

Thakur forbids spiritual practice with women companions as in Ghoshpara again and again

[1] Qualities that lead Godward
[2] Qualities that cause action, which in turn pull the mind away from God

And then addressing Narayan, he says, "The adopted mother of Haripada came here. I warned Haripada about her. She belongs to the Ghoshpara sect. I asked her, "Have you found your supporter [man]?" She said, "Yes, so and so Chakravarti."

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Oh! Nilkantha came that day. What a spiritual mood he was in! He said that he would come again and sing. Today they are dancing over there. Please go and have a look. (To Ramlal) There is no oil. (Peeps into the container) No, there is no oil in the container.

Chapter III

Union of Purusha and Prakriti – who were Radha and Krishna? Adyashakti

Vedantavagish, Dayananda Saraswati, Col. Olcott, Surendra and Narayan

Sri Ramakrishna is now pacing back and forth – from inside his room to the southern verandah. Next he goes to the western semi-circular verandah to have a glimpse of the Ganges.

Effect of good and bad environment: images, trees and young boys

After awhile he sits down on the smaller cot. It is three o'clock. The devotees come in and sit down again on the floor. Thakur sits silent on the smaller cot. From time to time he glances at the wall of the room where a number of pictures hang. To his right is the picture of Goddess Vinapani (Saraswati) and close by, the picture of Nitai and Gaur singing devotional songs with devotees. In front of Thakur, there are the pictures of Dhruva, Prahlada, and an image of Mother Kali. To his right on the wall is the

image of Mother Rajarajeshvari, and on the back wall that of Jesus raising the drowning Peter. Suddenly Thakur says to M., "Look here, it is good to keep the picture of sadhus and sannyasins in the room. When you wake up in the morning, it is good to see the face of a sadhu or a sannyasin instead of other people. To have English pictures on the wall – pictures of rich men, or a king, or a queen, or a prince, or a European couple strolling together – gives rise to rajas."

"The company you keep makes your character. That is why even pictures influence you. After all, birds of a feather flock together! A paramahamsa keeps a few boys with him. He allows boys five or six years old to be near him. In the state of a paramahamsa, one likes the company of children. Children are not subject to the gunas – sattva, rajas, or tamas.

"When you see a tree, you are reminded of a hermitage where rishis practice austerities."

A brahmin from Sinthi enters the room. He salutes Thakur. He has studied Vedanta in Kashi.

Sri Ramakrishna — How do you do? It's been a long time since your last visit.

The Pundit (smiling) — Household duties, sir. And you know well that it is hard to find time.

The pundit sits down and talks to Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna — You were in Kashi for a long time. Tell me what you saw there. Tell me something about Dayananda[1].

[1]Dayananda Saraswati (1824 -1883). He was in Ananda Bagh in Kashi in 1869 holding discussions. From December 1872 to March 1873, he stayed in Tagore's Pramod garden house in Nainal Bagan in Calcutta. It

The Pundit — I did meet Dayananda. You also met him.

Sri Ramakrishna — I went to meet him in a garden on the other side of the Ganges. Keshab Sen was supposed to come that day and he was very eager to meet Keshab – like a chatak bird anxious for a drop of rainwater. He is a great scholar. He made fun of the Bengali language, calling it '*Gauranga Bhasha*' (the language of Gaur.) He believes in gods but Keshab didn't. Dayananda said, 'God has created so many things, can He not create gods as well?' But he believed in the formless God too. When Captain repeated the name of Rama, Dayananda said, 'You could just as well have repeated sandesh, sandesh.'

The Pundit — Religious scholars had long discussions with Dayananda in Kashi. At the end, all of them stood against him. The discussion rose to such a pitch that he had to flee to save himself. All of them shouted with one voice: 'Despise what Dayananda said!'

Sri Ramakrishna and Theosophy – do Theosophists yearningly seek the Lord?

(The Pundit continues) "I also met Colonel Olcott. He says that each one is a great soul. And that there exist the regions of the moon, the sun and the stars – that the subtle body can go to these regions. He talked about such other things. Well sir, how do you find Theosophy?"

Sri Ramakrishna — Bhakti is the one thing needed – love for the Lord. Do they (the Theosophists) seek bhakti? If so, it is good. If their ideal is God-realization, it is good. Just by believing in the lunar, the solar and

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was then Sri Ramakrishna, Keshab and Captain met him. Perhaps Captain also met Thakur during that time.

the stellar regions, and in great souls, does not mean that one is seeking the Lord. One should practice spiritual disciplines to gain bhakti for His lotus feet; one must call for Him with a longing heart.

Saying so, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing a song of Ramprasad.

Song –

How can you, O my mind, know God, groping as you are like a mad man in a dark room?

He can be grasped only through ecstatic love; it is impossible to grasp Him otherwise.

The great yogi communes with God from age to age to attain ecstatic love.

As soon as love arises, He draws the soul as a magnet draws a piece of iron.

"God is not to be found in any religious text, philosophy, or in the Vedanta. You will not succeed unless you are restless for Him."

Song –

Neither through the *Vedas*, the *Tantras*, nor the six systems of philosophy can you know Him.

He is adroit in the bliss of divine love and dwells within as everlasting joy.

"You need to have deep longing for God. Listen to this song."

Can everybody have the vision of Radha?[1]

Avatars also engage in *sadhana* to serve as examples to mankind – God-realization is possible only through *sadhana*

[1] For complete song, refer Section XII, Chapter III of this volume

"Sadhana (spiritual disciplines) is essential. Can one see the Lord quickly, without any effort?

"Somebody asked, 'Why can't I have the vision of the Lord?' The answer to his question came to my mind. 'If you want to catch a big fish,' I said to him, 'you have to make arrangements for it. First prepare the bait and take the rod and line in your hand. At the smell of the bait, fish will come up from deep waters. The movement of the water will show that a big fish is coming.'

"If you want to eat butter, how will it help you to go on repeating, 'There is butter in the milk.' You will have to work hard churning the milk to get the butter. You can't have the vision of the Lord just by repeating that the Lord exists. You have to practice *sadhana*.

"Even Bhagavati (the Mother of the Universe) practiced penance seated on five skulls to serve as an example to mankind. Sri Krishna was the Supreme Brahman Himself. He also performed austerities for the instruction of mankind after he found the Radhayantra[1]."

Radha indeed is the Primeval Power and Prakriti – Purusha and Prakriti – Brahman and His Power are inseparable

"Sri Krishna is Purusha[2] and Radha is Prakriti[3]. She is the *Chitshakti*[4], the Primeval Power. Radha is Prakriti endowed with the three gunas. She embodies the

[1] A mystic diagram symbolizing Radha
[2] Male aspect of God
[3] Female aspect of God
[4] Power of Divine Consciousness

qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. It is like peeling an onion. At first its skin is dark red, then lighter red, and inside it is white. The Vaishnava scripture talks of 'Kam-Radha', 'Prem-Radha' and 'Nitya-Radha'. Chandravali was 'Kam-Radha', Srimati (another name of Radha) was 'Prem-Radha' and Nanda had the vision of 'Nitya-Radha' with Gopal (baby Krishna) in her lap[1].

"The *Chitshakti* and Brahman of Vedanta are identical – like water and its wetness. The moment you think of the wetness of water, you are reminded of water. And the moment you think of water, you must think of its wetness. Take the example of the snake and its wriggling movement. The moment you think of the serpentine movement, you are reminded of the snake. When do I call Him Brahman? When He is inactive and unattached to work. A man may put on clothes, yet he remains the same man as when he was naked. He was naked, now he is clothed. He may again take off his clothes. The snake has poison inside, but it does not affect the snake. It is poison only for him who is bitten by the snake. Brahman Himself is unattached to work.

"Prakriti shows its grandeur where there is name and form. Sita said to Hanuman, 'Dear child, I, myself, am Rama in one form and Sita in another. I, myself, am Indra – and also Indrani in another form. I am Brahma in one form and Brahmani in the other. Similarly, I am Rudra in one form and Rudrani in another[2].' All names and forms are the manifestation of the power of *Chitshakti*. Indeed, it manifests itself everywhere – in meditation as well as in the one who meditates. As long as I am conscious that I am meditating, I am in Her

[1] Kam-Radha is amorous love; Prem-Radha is pure and ecstatic love and Nitya-Radha, everlasting love. Nanda was the foster father of Sri Krishna.

[2] Indrani, Brahmani and Rudrani are the consorts of Indra, Brahma and Rudra

jurisdiction. (To M.) You must internalize all this. You must hear the *Veda* and the *Purana* and carry out what they instruct.

(To the Pundit) "It is good to associate with sadhus every now and then. Man always suffers from the disease of worldliness. The company of sadhus mitigates it to a large extent."

Instruction to Vedantavagish: associate with sadhus; none is mine; attitude of a servant

"I and mine! Jnana (spiritual wisdom) is the belief: 'Oh, Lord, it is You who do everything. Only You are my own. Besides, all these – home, family, near and dear ones, friends and the whole universe – all are Yours. Indeed, everything is Yours.' And ajnana (nescience) is the belief: 'I do all this; I am the doer. It is my home, my family, my sons, my friends and all worldly activities.'

"A guru was explaining to his disciple that only the Lord was his own and none else really belonged to him. The disciple said, 'Sir, my mother and my wife have so much love for me. If they don't see me, it is all darkness for them. Oh, how they love me!' The guru said, 'You are mistaken. Let me show you that none of these is yours. Take some of these pills with you. Swallow them when you go home and lie down. People will think that you are dead, but you will remain conscious of the external world. You will be able to see and hear everything. Then I will visit your home.'

"The disciple did as he was instructed. As soon as he reached home, he swallowed the pills and lay down. He appeared unconscious. His mother, his wife, and other members of the family began to wail. Just then his guru arrived in the guise of a physician. When they told him why they were grieving, he said, 'There is medicine for it. It will bring him back to life and he will

get up. But let me tell you that my medicine first has to be taken by one of his relatives before it is given to him. The person who swallows it will die first. You are all here: mother, wife and so on. I am very sure that one of you will take the pill and save the young man.'

"The disciple heard all this. First the physician called the mother who was wallowing in grief. He said, 'Mother, no more wailing for you. Just take this medicine and your son will be saved. But you will die.' The mother took the pills in her hand and began to think about it. After a great deal of reflection, she cried, 'My son, I have other sons and daughters! I am wondering what will happen to them if I die! Who will look after them and feed them?' Next the physician called the wife and gave her the medicine. The wife was also weeping bitterly. She took the medicine in her hand. She had heard that she would die if she took it. With tears in her eyes, she said, 'I say, he has already met his destiny. Tell me, what will happen to my little children? Who will protect them? How can I take this medicine?' By this time, the disciple had recovered from the effects of the medicine. He had understood that nobody was really his own. He immediately got up and left with his guru. The guru said to him, 'There is none but the Lord who is your own.'

"So the right thing is to act upon that which endears Him to you, that which develops bhakti for His lotus feet. You see, this world is ephemeral. There is no real stuff in it."

The householder cannot renounce completely – jnana cannot enter the inner apartments, but bhakti can

The Pundit (smiling) — Sir, I feel total dispassion (*vairagya*) when I come here and see you. I feel like going away and leaving the world.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, why renounce? You people should renounce the world mentally. Live in your household with a spirit of nonattachment.

"Surendra brought his bedding, intending to stay here from time to time. For one or two days, he did come and stay. Then his wife said to him, 'You may go wherever you like during the day but at night you must not leave home.' Surendra was helpless – he could not spend the night away from his home![2]

"And look here, it is futile to just reason. Be restless for Him and learn to love Him. Reasoning and jnana are like men who can only enter the outer rooms. But bhakti is like women who can go into the inner apartments.

"You have to establish a specific kind of relationship with the Lord to attain Him. Sanaka and other rishis nurtured the *shanta* (peaceful) attitude, while Hanuman had the *dasa* (servant) attitude. Sridama, Sudama and the cowboys of Braja took up the *sakhya* attitude (of a friend), while Yashoda had the *vatsalya* (filial) attitude – she took the Lord as her son. Srimati (Radha) took up the *madhura* attitude (that of a sweetheart).

"Oh, God! You are the Lord, I am your servant. This bhava is the *dasa* (servant) attitude. It is a very good attitude for a spiritual aspirant."

Pundit — Yes, sir.

Chapter IV

Instructions to Ishan – Bhakti Yoga and Karma Yoga – signs of jnana

The Pundit from Sinthi has gone. Twilight is fast approaching. Music for the arati begins in the Kali Temple. Thakur bows before the pictures of the deities. He sits on the smaller cot, preoccupied with some thought. A number of devotees come in again and sit on the floor. There is silence in the room.

An hour has elapsed when Ishan Mukherji and Kishori arrive. They salute Thakur and take their seats. Ishan is very fond of rituals like *purashcharana*[1] described in the holy books. He is a Karma Yogi. Thakur now talks.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is no use repeating, 'Jnana, jnana.' There are two signs that mark the attainment of spiritual knowledge. One is *anuraga*, that is, love for God. You may reason and discuss, but if you have no love for the Lord, no devotion for Him, it is all futile. The second sign is the awakening of the Kundalini power. As long as the Kundalini lies dormant, one does not gain jnana. You may read book after book and reason them out but have no restlessness for God. That is not a sign of jnana.

"When the Kundalini power awakens, one experiences bhava[2], bhakti[3] and *prema*[4]. This is called Bhakti Yoga.

"Karma Yoga is an extremely difficult path. By practicing Karma Yoga, one gains many occult powers – power to perform miracles."

Ishan — I am going to meet Hazra Mahashay.

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[1] The methodical increase and decrease of the repetition of the holy mantra.
[2] Ecstasy
[3] Devotion and love for God
[4] Intense love for God

Thakur remains silent. After awhile Ishan returns to the room, accompanied by Hazra. Thakur is still seated silently. After awhile Hazra says to Ishan, "Let's go. He is going to meditate." Both Ishan and Hazra leave.

Thakur is still seated silently. Shortly he begins to meditate. He counts japa on his fingers, then he touches his fingertips first to the top of his head, then to his forehead, his throat, his heart and lastly his navel.

Is he meditating on the Primeval Power through the six spiritual centres? Is this the communion with God talked about in the Shiva Samhita and other holy texts?

Chapter V

The path of nivritti[1] – karma falls off after God-realization

Instructions to Ishan: arise and awake – path of Karma Yoga is extremely difficult

Ishan goes to the Kali Temple with Hazra. Thakur has been meditating. It is about 7.30 p.m. Just then Adhar comes in.

[1] Non-worldliness

After awhile Thakur goes for the *darshan*[1] of Mother Kali. After Her darshan he picks up some flowers offered at the feet of the deity and brings them to touch his forehead. Next he pays obeisance to the Mother, circumambulates round Her and fans Her with the *chamara*[2]. He is filled with divine emotion. Coming out of the shrine, he sees Ishan performing sandhya with *koshakushi*[3].

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ishan) — Are you still here? Have you been performing evening worship? Listen to this song.

Filled with divine emotion Sri Ramakrishna sits beside Ishan and sings in a sweet voice –

What need of going to the Ganges, Prabhas, Kashi, Kanchi if the lips can utter 'Kali, Kali' when my life ebbs away?

He who utters Kali in all the three *sandhyas*[4] needs no daily ritualistic worship.

Worship itself follows his footsteps but can never overtake him.

Charity, kindness and vows no longer appeal to him.

For Madan, the poet, all worship means the red feet of the Blissful Mother.

Who can know the qualities of the holy name of Kali,

The praises of which are sung by the God of gods, Mahadeva Himself?

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[1] To see and pay homage

[2] A fan made of the white hair from the tail of the chamari yak, used in Hindu ritual worship

[3] A kosha is a small water container, a kushi is a small spoon for removing water from it. Both are usually made of copper and are used in ritualistic worship.

[4] At dawn, noon and twilight hour

"How long does one have to perform evening worship and other rituals? As long as one does not develop bhakti for His lotus feet, as long as the eyes do not fill with tears while repeating His name, and as long as the hair of one's body does not stand on end."

> Says Ramprasad: Knowing the truth that Kali is the Supreme Brahman, I bowed before both bhakti and salvation and gave up all ideas of what *dharma* and *adharma* are.

"The blossom falls off as soon as the fruit appears. When one develops bhakti, when one attains the Lord, sandhya and other rituals fall off.

"When the daughter-in-law of the house is pregnant, the mother-in-law gradually frees her from work. When she has been pregnant for nine months, her mother-in-law does not allow her to work at all. When the infant is born, the mother only attends to it, taking it in her lap. She doesn't have to attend to any other work. Similarly, when one has attained the Lord, one gives up rituals like sandhya.

"By leisurely playing the drum at a slow beat, you cannot attain much. A deep dispassion (*vairagya*) is needed. Stretching the year to fourteen months is futile. It seems you have no firm determination, no grit. You are like flattened rice soaked in milk. Be up and doing! Gird your loins!

"That is why I don't like the song, 'Fasten thyself to Hari, O Brother. You will sooner or later succeed.' I don't like this 'you will sooner or later succeed'. I want deep dispassion. I say the same to Hazra."

Sri Ramakrishna and principle of yoga – 'lust and greed' are impediments to yoga

"You ask me why you don't develop deep dispassion. There is a reason for it. You have a strong desire for sense enjoyments, your mind is filled with *pravritti*[1]. I say the same to Hazra. In the countryside before they bring water to the fields, they make mud ridges on all four sides of the field so that water can't flow out. They are mud ridges, but they have water outlets here and there. There are holes. Water is brought with full force to the field, but it goes out through the holes. Our desires are like these holes, these outlets. You may be practicing *japa* (repetition of God's name) and austerities, but at the back of your mind, you have desires for sense enjoyments. From the outlets of desire, everything leaks out.

"One catches fish with a bamboo trap. Ordinarily bamboo is straight, but when bent to the ground, it acts as a fish trap. Desire for sense enjoyments is the fish, so the mind remains bent toward the world. If there is no desire, the mind naturally orients upward, toward the Lord.

"Do you know how? Like the needles of a scale. Because of the weight of 'lust and greed,' the upper needle does not align itself with the lower needle. Thus one strays from the path of yoga. Haven't you seen the flame of a lamp? It flickers by just a puff of air. The state of yoga is like the flame of a lamp where there is no wind.

"Our mind is spread out in different directions. A part of it has reached Dacca, a part Delhi and another part Coochbehar. You have to collect this mind and concentrate it to a point. If you want a cloth worth sixteen annas[2], you have to pay this amount to the cloth merchant. Even if there is a slight obstacle, yoga is not

[1] Worldliness
[2] Equivalent to one Rupee

possible. If the telegraph wire is broken, howsoever small the break may be, it will not convey your message."

Trailokya and the power of faith – work without expectation of reward – compel yourself to say: You are my Mother

"You are living a householder's life. What harm is there in that? But one has to surrender the fruit of one's actions completely to the Lord. One must not expect any reward whatsoever.

"Even so, the fact is that the desire for bhakti is not to be counted as desire. It is all right to desire bhakti and to pray for it.

"You have to employ the tamas of bhakti. You must force the Mother."

> The lawsuit between the Mother and the son shall gain great momentum, says Ramprasad.
>
> I shall only lie restfully when the Mother, having pardoned me, raises me in Her arms.

"Trailokya once said, 'As I have taken birth in her family, I have a right to her property.'

"I say, you have your own Mother. She is no artificial Mother, She is not even a godmother. Whom can you force, if not Her? Just say –

> Mother, am I a prematurely born child of weak constitution? I am not afraid of Your red angry eyes!
>
> This time I am going to file a suit in the court of Srinath (Shiva) and I will be awarded the decree on just one point.

"She is your own Mother. Compel Her! If you are a part of someone, you are also attracted by him. Because I am

a part of the Divine Mother, She attracts me. He who is a genuine worshipper of Shiva receives a portion of Shiva. Some of Shiva's characteristics enter into him. He who is a genuine Vaishnava is endowed with some of elements of Narayana. Besides, you have no worldly duties now. Take to meditation for some days. You have seen that there is no real substance in the world."

Thakur sings in his sweet, melodious voice –

O my mind, just think about it. Nobody really belongs to anyone in the world. There is mere illusion in the world.

Don't forget the *Dakshina*[1] Mother Kali by getting ensnared in Her maya.

It is just for two or three days that people call you the lord, the master.

They will cease to call you the master when the Master in the form of death arrives.

Just think about it. Will your friends and relatives accompany you when you are dying?

This beloved wife of yours will sprinkle Ganges water on you to evade evil.

Arbitration, leadership, desire to build hospitals and dispensaries, desire to have fame and learning – all these mark the early stages of life – God-realization after giving up the pacifier

"What are you doing as the leader, arbitrator and such things? I hear that they select you as their arbitrator to settle their disputes and quarrels. You have been doing this for a long time. Let them who care to do it, do it. Now give more and more of your mind to God's lotus

[1] Bestower of happiness and bliss

feet. They say, 'Ravana died in Lanka while Behula wept her heart out[1]!'

"The same was said by Sambhu. He said, 'I will found hospitals and dispensaries.' He was a devotee. So I said to him, 'Will you ask Bhagavan for hospitals and dispensaries when you have His vision?'

"Keshab Sen asked me, 'Why can't I see the Lord?' I replied, 'You are busy with name and fame, scholarship and so on. That's why you don't see Him.' As long as the infant continues to suck on the pacifier, the mother does not come to him. After awhile the infant throws away the pacifier and cries aloud. The mother then takes down the rice pot from the fire and comes to it.

"You are engaged in arbitration. The Mother says to Herself, 'My son is doing fine as a leader. Let him enjoy himself.' "

All this time Ishan has been holding Thakur's feet. He says humbly to him, still holding his feet, "It is not that I have been doing all this willfully."

Mahamaya at the root of all desires – that's why one takes to *karmakanda*[2]

Sri Ramakrishna — I know, it is the Mother's game. Her sport indeed! Mahamaya wants to keep everybody bound to the world. You know how it is? "Many boats float on the ocean of the world. How many of them sink!" Again, "Out of a hundred-thousand kites, only one or two have their strings cut through and are thus set free; oh, how then You laugh and clap Your hands!" Similarly, out of a million people, only one or two attain

[1] Behula was unrelated to Ravana and lived many years later. This saying shows how man gives way to totally irrelevant matters.
[2] Work; activity

liberation. All the rest remain bound by the Mother's will.

"Haven't you seen the game of hide and seek? It is the Grand-dame's will that the game should continue. If everybody were to touch the Grand-dame, the game would not continue. So the Grand-dame does not want everybody to touch her.

"You see, in large shops big sacks of rice are placed as high as the roof. Besides rice, lentils are also stored there. To save them from mice, the shopkeeper puts some sweetened puffed rice in a straw basket. They taste sweet and have their own smell, so all the mice busy themselves eating from the basket, not knowing about the big sacks. Similarly, man is enchanted with 'lust and greed' and does not seek the Lord."

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna has no desire other than devotion to God

Sri Ramakrishna — Rama said to Narada, 'Please ask me for a boon.' Narada said, 'Rama, there is nothing that I need. What boon can I ask for? But if you grant me a boon, please grant that I may have pure love for your lotus feet. And that I may never be deluded by your world-bewitching maya.' Rama said, 'Narada, ask

for some other boon.' Narada again said, 'No, Rama! I don't want anything else. Only grant that I may have pure love for your lotus feet.'

"I prayed to the Divine Mother, saying –

Mother, I don't ask for worldly esteem,

I don't ask for the eight occult powers, Mother.

O Mother, I don't want a hundred powers!

Nor do I ask for creature comforts, Mother.

Only grant, O Mother, that I may gain pure love for Your lotus feet.

"The *Adhyatma* (*Ramayana*) says this: Lakshmana asked Rama, 'Rama, you live in so many *bhavas* (spiritual states) and aspects. On which aspect should I meditate?' Rama said, 'Brother, know for certain that wherever you find *urjita* (ecstatic, deep) bhakti, my presence is there.' In *urjita* bhakti one laughs, weeps, dances and sings. If you see such bhakti developed in a person, know for certain that the Lord has manifested in him. Chaitanya Deva reached that state.

The devotees listen to Thakur, speechless with wonder. They hear all these words as if they were a celestial message from above. Some of them say to themselves, "Sri Ramakrishna says, 'One laughs, weeps, dances and sings in ecstatic love.' But it is not that only Chaitanya Deva had reached this state. Thakur also has this very state. Does it mean then that the Lord Himself has manifested here at this spot?"

Thakur continues to shower his nectarine words – words relating to the path of *nivritti*[1]. He continues what he has been telling Ishan in his deep serious voice.

[1] Non-worldliness

Section I

Sri Ramakrishna's meeting with Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar in Calcutta

Chapter I

Vidyasagar's residence

It is Saturday, 5 August 1882, the sixth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Shravana. It is about four o'clock in the afternoon.

Sri Ramakrishna is going to Badurbagan by carriage on the main road in Calcutta to visit Vidyasagar at his house. Bhavanath, Hazra and M. accompany him.

Sri Ramakrishna was born in Kamarpukur, a village in the Hooghly district situated near Beersingh, Vidyasagar's the native village. Since childhood, Sri Ramakrishna has heard of Vidyasagar's acts of charity. In the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, he learned of his scholarship and compassionate nature. M. is a teacher in Vidyasagar's school. Learning this, Thakur asked him, "Will you take me to see Vidyasagar? I would like very much to meet him." M. spoke to Vidyasagar, who was delighted and asked M. to come on Saturday at four o'clock. Vidyasagar had asked him, "What kind of a paramahamsa is he? Does he wear gerua[1]?" M. had replied, "No sir, he is a unique person. He wears a red-bordered dhoti and a short coat, a shirt and varnished slippers. He lives in a room in Rasmani's

[1] Ochre-colored cloth of a sannyasin

Kali Temple. He sleeps on a wooden cot with only a bedspread and a mosquito net. Outwardly there is no sign of holiness, but inwardly he knows nothing but the Lord. Day and night he meditates on Him."

The carriage starts from the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. Having crossed the bridge, it soon reaches Amherst Street through Shyambazar. When the devotees tell Thakur that the carriage is nearing Badurbagan, Thakur begins to talk like a child full of joy. However, there is a sudden change in his mood as the carriage reaches Amherst Street. It seems to be a prelude to his going into divine ecstasy.

As the carriage approaches Rammohan Roy's garden house, M. hasn't noticed the change in Thakur's mood. Hurriedly he exclaims, "This is Rammohan Roy's house." Thakur is annoyed and says, "Such things don't appeal to me now. I don't care about them." He is passing into divine ecstasy.

The carriage stops at the gate to Vidyasagar's house. It is a two-story building of British taste. The building sits in the middle of the plot and has a wall on all four sides. The gate and the front door are on the western side of the house, the gate to the south of the door. Between the western wall and the two-storied building are flowering trees and plants. One climbs upstairs after passing through the western ground floor room. Vidyasagar is on the upper floor. At the top of the staircase is a room on the north, to its east a hall. Vidyasagar's bedroom is to the southeast of the hall. There is another room on the south. All the rooms are full of precious books. Most of the books are beautifully bound and artistically arranged in bookshelves that line the wall. On the eastern side of the hall are a few chairs and a table. Vidyasagar sits there facing west when he works. When he has visitors, they also sit around the table. There is stationery visible – paper, pen, inkpot, blotting paper, several letters, a bound cashbook, files, and a few books Vidyasagar is reading. Exactly

to the south of the wooden divan is a bedstead where he sleeps.

What is written on the letters lying on the table under the paperweight? Perhaps a widow has written, "My minor child is without a father. There is nobody to take care of him. You will have to look after him." Someone else might have written, "You went to Kharmata, so we didn't get our monthly allowance. This caused us great distress." Another poor person may have written, "I have been admitted to your school on a full scholarship, but I have no means to buy books." Yet another person might write, "My family hasn't the means to feed itself. Kindly arrange a job for me." A teacher from the school perhaps has written, "My sister has lost her husband and her whole burden has fallen on my shoulders. My salary is too meagre to meet expenses." Yet another has perhaps written from a foreign country, "I am in trouble here. You are a friend of the poor. Kindly send me some money and save me from impending distress." And yet another has written, "Settlement must be made on such-and-such date. Kindly come on this day and settle the dispute."

Thakur descends from the carriage. M. leads him to the house. Walking through flowering trees on the way to the house, Thakur touches the buttons of his shirt and asks M. in a childlike manner, "My shirt is unbuttoned. Is there any harm in it?" He is dressed in a broadcloth shirt and a red-bordered dhoti with one end over his shoulder. He has varnished slippers on his feet. M. says, "Please don't worry about it. You will not offend anyone. You needn't button your shirt." Just as a child feels reassured after an explanation, Thakur's mind is at peace.

Chapter II

Vidyasagar

Having climbed the staircase, Thakur enters the first room with the devotees (the room just to the north). Vidyasagar is seated at the north end of the room facing south. In front of him is a long rectangular polished table. On the east side of the table is a bench with a back. A number of chairs have been placed to the south and west of the table. Vidyasagar is talking to some of his friends.

As Thakur enters, Vidyasagar stands up to greet him. Thakur stands near the eastern edge of the table facing west with his right hand on the table. Behind him is the bench. He looks at Vidyasagar as though he were a former acquaintance. He laughs in ecstasy.

Vidyasagar must be sixty-two or sixty-three years old. He is sixteen or seventeen years older than Sri Ramakrishna. He is clad in a white-bordered dhoti, a short-sleeved flannel shirt, and is wearing slippers. He has an Orissa-cut[1] hairstyle. His gleaming white false teeth show when he talks. Short in stature, Vidyasagar has a very large head and a broad forehead. He is a brahmin, so he wears a holy thread around his neck.

Vidyasagar is a man of many facets. One of his great loves is of learning. One day he actually began to weep when he said to M, "How much I wanted to continue my studies! But it was not to be. I was so entangled in worldly affairs, I didn't have time.'

A second love is for all beings. Vidyasagar is an ocean of compassion. Seeing a calf deprived of its mother's milk, he could not drink milk for many years – not until his health declined considerably. He does not travel in a carriage, because the horse

[1] The lower part of the head is shaved

pulling it cannot speak of its burden. One day he saw a workman lying on the road struck by cholera, his basket lying near. He picked the man up, brought him home, and nursed him.

A third love is independence. Because of a disagreement with his proprietors, Vidyasagar resigned from the post of Principal of the Sanskrit College.

His fourth characteristic is that he does not care for social decorum. He loved a teacher. At the time of his daughter's marriage, Vidyasagar went to the feast[1] with a gift of cloth under his arm.

A fifth love is devotion to his mother. She had said to him, "Iswar, if you don't come to the marriage of your brother, I will feel very bad." On strength of will, Vidyasagar walked on foot all the way from Calcutta to his village of Beersingh. On the way he had to cross the Damodar river and there was no boat available, so he swam across. He presented himself before his mother, dripping wet, the very night of the marriage. He said, "Mother, here I am!"

Vidyasagar's adoration of Sri Ramakrishna – their conversation

Entering into an ecstatic mood, Thakur stands quiet for quite some time. To control his ecstasy, he now and then says, "I want a drink of water." The boys of the household, relatives and friends of Vidyasagar, quickly gather around.

Thakur is about to sit on the bench, still absorbed in ecstasy. A boy of seventeen or eighteen is already sitting there. He has come to Vidyasagar to ask help with his studies. In such a spiritual mood, with the insight of a rishi, Thakur is able to understand what the boy is thinking. He moves away

[1] On the ceremony of taking the last meal by a Hindu bride on the night immediately preceding the wedding day

a little and says, in ecstasy, "Mother, this boy has great attachment to worldly life, your world of ignorance. This boy belongs to the world of ignorance."

Does Thakur mean that it is ironic for the boy to study to make money instead of to acquire the knowledge of Brahman?

Vidyasagar anxiously asks somebody to bring water. He asks M., "Will he take some refreshments?" M. replies, "Yes sir, please bring something." Vidyasagar leaves hurriedly and returns with numerous sweets. He says, "These are from Burdwan." Some of them are offered to Thakur. Hazra and Bhavanath also take some. When M. is offered them, Vidyasagar says, "He is a child of this house. There is no formality with him." Thakur speaks of a particular young man who has been sitting in front of him. He says, "This boy possesses good sattvic qualities. Inwardly he is full of pith and marrow[1]. He is like the Phalgu river with a bed which appears dried up – but dig a little and you find an active current of water underneath."

After taking some sweets, Thakur talks with Vidyasagar, a smile playing on his face. Soon the whole room is full of people. Some are seated, others stand.

Sri Ramakrishna — Today I have come to the ocean[2]. Until now I have come across canals, lakes, and rivers. Now I see the ocean. (All laugh.) [Thakur is referring to the literal meaning of Vidyasagar, which is the 'ocean of knowledge'.]

Vidyasagar (laughing) — Then, sir, you are welcome to take some salt water. (Laughter.)

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[1] *Antasarra*
[2] Sagar

Sri Ramakrishna — No, my dear sir, you are surely not the salt ocean. You are not the ocean of avidya[1]. You are the ocean of vidya[2], the ocean of milk! (All laugh.)

Vidyasagar — Sir, you may say so if you like.

Thakur speaks while Vidyasagar remains silent.

Sattvic actions of Vidyasagar – "You, too, are a perfected man"

"Your actions are sattvic by nature. It is the rajas of sattva. Sattva makes one do works of compassion. When a work is done out of compassion, though it is rajasic, it is the rajas of sattva. There is no harm in it. Shukadeva and others were compassionate in order to teach humanity – to teach about God to humanity. It is good that you are giving food and education. These charitable acts lead to God-realization if undertaken selflessly. They who act to earn a name or religious merit are not selfless in their actions. But you deserve to be called a perfect man."

Vidyasagar — How is that, sir?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Potatoes and rice aren't tender until they're siddha (well-boiled). Your kindness for others has made you soft and tender of heart[3]. (Laughter.)

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[1] Ignorance which leads one away from God
[2] True knowledge leading Godward
[3] The word siddha either means 'well-boiled' or a 'perfect man'; hence, Thakur's pun

Vidyasagar (laughing) — But kalai pulse when siddha (well-boiled), gets harder! Is that not so? (Everybody laughs.)

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, you are no such thing. You are not a mere pundit – dry and hard and good for nothing. A vulture soars high in the sky, but its eyes are fixed on the charnel-pits where the carcasses of animals are burned. They who are pundits due to learning are scholars in name – but they are attached to 'lust and gold' – they look for decomposed corpses, just like a vulture. Fondness for the world is avidya; compassion, devotion, love of God, non-attachment[1], are the wealth of vidya.

Vidyasagar listens to Thakur silently. Everyone gazes fixedly at the blissful personage and drinks the nectar of his words.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna – jnana yoga and Vedanta

Vidyasagar is a very learned man. When he was a student in the Sanskrit College, he was at the top of his class. He secured first position and won a gold medal and a scholarship. Gradually he reached the position of Principal of the Sanskrit College. He was a specialist in Sanskrit grammar and poetic literature. He learned English by resolute self-effort.

Vidyasagar did not instruct anyone in religion. He had studied philosophy but when M. once asked him what he thought of Hindu philosophy, he replied, "I think that what they wanted to explain, they were unable to explain." However, he would perform all

[1] Vairagya

> Hindu rituals, such as funeral ceremonies. He wore the sacred thread around his neck and whenever he wrote a letter in Bengali, he wrote as a letterhead: "Sri Sri Hari Sharanam" (Lord, I take refuge in You).
>
> Another day Vidyasagar had told M. his idea about God. He said, "He cannot be known. So what is our duty? In my opinion it is to conduct ourselves in such a way that if others followed us, the earth would become heaven. Everyone must try to do good to the world."
>
> While talking of vidya and avidya, Thakur speaks of the knowledge of Brahman. Vidyasagar, a very learned man who has studied the six Hindu systems of philosophy, has perhaps concluded that it is impossible to know anything about God.

Sri Ramakrishna — Brahman is beyond vidya and avidya. He transcends maya.

Problem of evil – Brahman is unattached[1] – pain and sorrow only relevant to the embodied soul

"There are both vidya maya and avidya maya in the world. There are jnana and bhakti – as well as 'lust and greed'. There is righteousness, and there is unrighteousness; there is good as well as evil. But Brahman is not concerned with all these. Good and bad belong to embodied beings, as does righteousness and unrighteousness. God is not affected by them.

"It is like the light of a lamp. You may read the *Bhagavata* with the help of that light. You can also forge a document with criminal intent in the

[1] *Nirlipta*

same light. In both cases the lamp remains unaffected.

"The sun sheds light on the good as well as on the wicked.

"You may then ask, how do you explain sorrow, sin, restlessness and the like? The answer is that they only concern embodied beings. Brahman is above and beyond them. There is poison in the fangs of a snake, but the poison doesn't affect it – though when the snake bites a creature, it dies."

Brahman is indescribable and impossible to verbalize[1]
(the unknown and the unknowable)

"What Brahman is cannot be described. Everything – the *Vedas*, the *Puranas*, the *Tantras* and the six systems of philosophy – has been defiled, like the leavings of food. For when one reads the scriptures, one must use the vocal organs and this causes them to be in touch with the mouth, so to speak. Thus they have all been defiled, like the leavings of food. The one exception is Brahman. No one in this world has yet been able to give proper and adequate expression to God the Absolute."

Vidyasagar (to his friends) — Oh, this is beautiful. I must say I have learned something today.

Sri Ramakrishna — A man had two sons. He placed both of them under the care of a preceptor to acquire the knowledge of Brahman. After many

[1] *Avyapadesyam*

years both of them returned from the guru's house and saluted their father. The father wished to see how deeply they had understood the knowledge of Brahman (jnana). He asked the elder son, 'Son, you have studied the scriptures. Tell me what God the Absolute is.' The elder son quoted several verses from the *Vedas* to explain the nature of Brahman. His father remained silent. When the father put the question to his younger son, the boy hung his head and sat quite mute. He uttered not a word. The father said happily, 'Son, you indeed have understood a little about God the Absolute. What Brahman is cannot be expressed in words.'

"Man thinks that he has known God. An ant came to a mountain of sugar. It ate one particle of sugar and was filled. It took another particle and, as it went its way, it thought that the next time it would take the whole mountain home. Such, alas, is the condition of insignificant man. Men don't know that Brahman is beyond mind and speech.

"Who can know God, however great that man may be? Shukadeva and other holy sages were at best ants of the larger sort (big black ants). They might have been able to carry eight or ten grains of sugar in their mouths."

Brahman is indeed Sat-chit-ananda[1] – Nirvikalpa Samadhi and Brahmajnana

"Do you know how the *Vedas* and the *Puranas* have expressed God? If a person asks a man what he has seen after he has been to the ocean, he exclaims,

[1] Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute

'Ha! Oh, what I saw! What a disturbance! What waves!' It is the same in the case of Brahman. The *Vedas* say, 'He is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, the image of Bliss.' Shukadeva and other rishis, standing on the shore of the ocean of Brahman, saw and touched Him. According to some, these people did not go into the ocean, for no one can return after going into it.

"One attains Brahmajnana in the state of samadhi – one has the vision of Brahman. In that state the process of thinking completely stops; one is struck dumb. Nobody has the power to explain Brahman in words.

"A salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. (All laugh). But it could provide no information. As soon as it went into the ocean, it dissolved. Who could give the report?"

A person asks, "Does a man who has attained Brahmajnana, having become established in samadhi, remain ever-silent?"

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vidyasagar) — Shankaracharya retained his 'I of knowledge' to impart instruction to mankind. The man who has the vision of Brahman becomes silent. One reasons only as long as one has not seen Him. Clarified butter in a pan set over fire makes a sizzling sound as long as the water in it has not dried up. When it is well heated, it produces no sound. However, when you throw unbaked flour cake[1] in it, it again begins to make a sizzling sound. When the cake is

[1] *Luchi*

sufficiently cooked, the butter no longer makes a sound. In the same way a man comes down from samadhi to impart instruction to mankind, and then he talks.

"A bee buzzes as long as it doesn't sit on a flower. But when it settles down on the flower and begins to drink honey, it becomes silent. Intoxicated by drinking honey, it may again buzz.

"When you lower a pitcher into a pool of water, it produces a gurgling sound. But when the pitcher is full, there is no sound. (All laugh.) When water is poured from this pitcher again into another, one again hears a gurgling sound." (Laughter.)

Chapter IV

Jnana and vijnana – reconciliation of Non-dualism[1], Qualified non-dualism[2] and Dualism[3]

Sri Ramakrishna — The rishis attained Brahmajnana[4]. But if you have the slightest desire for worldly things, you cannot attain the knowledge of Brahman. What an effort the rishis made! They would leave their ashram in the morning to meditate and contemplate on God alone throughout the day. And then they ate only roots and fruit at night when they returned to their ashram. They would guard themselves from seeing, hearing, and

[1] Advaitavada
[2] Vishishtadvaita
[3] Dvaitavada
[4] Transcendental knowledge of God

touching other worldly things. Only then did they realize Brahman as their own inner Self[1].

"In the age of Kali, life is dependent on food and one cannot rid oneself of body-consciousness. It's not right in this state of mind to say, 'Soham[2].' One attends to worldly affairs and then says, 'I am Brahman' – this is not right. They who cannot rid themselves of worldly matters, they who cannot free themselves from the idea of 'I-ness', should keep the I-ness of the 'servant I,' or the 'devotee I'. One can also attain Him by the path of love and devotion for God.

"The jnani gets rid of his worldly identity by saying, 'Not this, not this,' and thus attains the knowledge of Brahman. It is like one who reaches the roof by leaving one step after another behind. But the vijnani has a special contact with Him and sees more than the jnani. He sees that the steps are made of the same material as the roof – bricks, brick dust and lime. He sees that He who has realized Brahman by saying, 'Not this, not this', has Himself become the living beings and the universe. The vijnani sees that He who is attributeless is also with attributes.

"A man cannot stay on the roof a long time. He comes down from the roof. They who have attained samadhi and had the vision of Brahman see when they come down that He Himself has become all living beings and the universe. Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti – one cannot stay long at ti [the highest note]. One cannot rid one's self of I-ness. On

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[1] *Bodhebodha*
[2] I am He

coming down from samadhi, one sees that He is me, and that He has become the entire universe and its living beings. This is vijnana.

"The path of the jnani[1] is one way to attain God. The path of knowledge combined with devotion is another way. So also is there the path of devotion (bhakti). The path of Jnana Yoga is as true as the path of Bhakti Yoga. One can reach God through various paths. But as long as one retains the ego, it is easier and more straightforward to follow the path of love and devotion.

"The vijnani sees that Brahman is immovable and actionless, like Mount Sumeru. The entire universe is made of His three gunas – of sattva, rajas and tamas – but He is unattached to them.

"The vijnani sees that He who is Brahman[2] is also Bhagavan[3]. He who is beyond attributes is also the Lord of six supernatural powers. His powers are the world and its living beings, the mind and intellect, love[4], dispassion[5] and divine knowledge. (Laughing) What kind of gentleman has no hearth and home, who might even have been forced to sell it? (Laughter.) The Lord possesses the six supernatural powers. Had God no dispassion, who would accept Him?" (General laughter.)

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[1] Man of knowledge
[2] God the Absolute
[3] The Personal God
[4] Bhakti
[5] Vairagya

God is present in all as all-pervading power[1] – but there is special manifestation of His power in some

"See how wonderful the world is! How many different things there are in this universe: the sun, the moon and the planets! How many kinds of creatures there are: big, small, good and bad! Some have more power, others less."

Vidyasagar — Has God given more power to some and less to others?

Sri Ramakrishna — He dwells in all beings as the all-pervading Power. He is present even in an ant. But there is a special manifestation of His power in some. If that were not true, how could one man defeat ten, while another person tries to run away from even one? Why do people have regard for you? Have you grown two horns? (Laughter.) Compared to others, you have more compassion and learning. This is why they have regard for you and come to see you. Don't you agree?

Vidyasagar smiles.

Mere learning and book learning are in vain – love and devotion for God is the one thing needful

Sri Ramakrishna — Mere learning is of no avail. It is for finding the means for attaining Him and knowing Him that one reads books. A sadhu had a book with him. Somebody asked him what it was about. The sadhu opened it and on every page was written, 'Om, Rama'. Nothing else.

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[1] *Vibhu*

"What is the message of the *Gita*? What you hear when you say the word ten times. By repeating it ten times, Gita becomes '*tyagi*'[1]. And this is what the *Gita* teaches: Oh man, giving up everything, strive to realize God. Whether one is a sadhu or a householder, one must get rid of all attachments in the mind.

"Chaitanyadeva, in the course of his pilgrimage through South India, came across a person reading the *Gita*. Another man sat a little away from him, listening and shedding tears. How bitterly he was weeping! Chaitanyadeva asked him, 'Do you understand all this?' He replied, 'No, Master, I do not understand these verses.' The former then asked why he was in tears. The devotee said, 'I see Arjuna's chariot; in it the Lord and Arjuna are talking. This is what fills my eyes with tears of joy and love.'

Chapter V

The secret of dualism

Sri Ramakrishna — Why does the vijnani practice love and devotion to God? The answer is that one cannot get rid of I-ness. Though one's ego disappears in the state of samadhi, it reappears. The ego of an ordinary man does not leave him. Cut the Ashwattha plant and the next day you will see it sprout again. (All laugh.)

[1] One who has given up the world for the sake of God – riches, honours, work with attachment, sensual pleasures etc.

"Even after attaining knowledge, I-ness reappears, nobody knows from where. You see a tiger in a dream. Even when you wake up, you find your heart still racing. All of man's trouble is due to this I-ness. The bullock bellows, '*Hamba*, *hamba*' (I, I). That is why it undergoes such tribulation. It is yoked to the plough, its body is exposed to the sun and rain, and then a butcher slaughters it. After that, shoes are made with its skin. Moreover, it is used to make drums and it is beaten mercilessly. (Laughter.)

"Even then, it is not spared. Last of all, strings are made with its intestines and the carder makes bows to card cotton. Then it no longer says, 'I, I.' Instead it says *'Tuhu Tuhu'* (you, you). It is only when it says 'You, you' that it is spared. 'Oh Lord, I am Your servant, You are my Master. I am your son, you are my Mother.'

"Rama asked Hanuman, 'With what attitude do you look on me?' Hanuman replied, 'Rama, when I have the feeling of 'I', I look upon you as the whole and myself as your part; you are the Master and I your servant. And Rama, when I attain the knowledge of the Absolute, I see that You are I and I am You.'

"The idea of Master and servant is good. The ego won't vanish, so let the rascal remain a 'servant I'."

Instruction to Vidyasagar: I and mine are ignorance

"I and mine: these are both born of ignorance. My house, my money, my learning, all these are my

riches – this feeling is a result of ignorance. Oh Lord, You are the doer and all these belong to You – house, family, sons, children, acquaintances, and friends. Such a feeling arises from knowledge.

"One must always remember death. Death will be the end of everything. You have come here to perform some actions, the way villagers come to Calcutta from their village to work. If a visitor comes to a rich man's garden, the keeper of the garden says, 'This is our garden and this our pond.' But if the proprietor dismisses the keeper because of some error he has committed, he is not entitled to take away even his mango-wood box – it is sent to him through the gatekeeper. (Laughter.)

"God laughs on two occasions. One, when a physician says to the mother of his patient, 'Mother, you needn't fear. I will cure your son.' The Lord says to Himself, 'I am taking his life and this fellow says that he is going to save him.' The physician thinks that he is the doer. He doesn't know that it is God alone who is the doer. The Lord also laughs when two brothers divide land between themselves, measuring it with a cord and saying 'This side is mine and that yours.' God laughs, saying to Himself, 'This world, the whole universe, is Mine, but these fellows say: this plot of land is mine and that is yours.' "

The way: faith, love and devotion[1] for God

"Can He be known by reasoning? Be His servant, take refuge in Him and call upon Him.

[1] Bhakti

(Smiling, to Vidyasagar) "Well, what is your attitude?"

Vidyasagar smiles gently. He says, "I will tell you one day when we are alone." (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — He cannot be known by learning and reasoning.

Saying this, Thakur begins to sing, intoxicated with divine love.

God is unknowable and limitless

Is there anybody who knows Kali, She who is the consort of *Kala*[1]? Even the six schools of philosophy do not reveal Her.

A yogi meditates on Her at the Muladhara[2] and Sahasrara[3].

A goose and a gander go around in this wilderness of lotuses and sport with each other. They are *Kala* and His consort.

My Divine Mother is the most beloved of Shiva, even as Sita is the most beloved of Rama.

She appears in Her majesty in each ghat[4] as an individual, just as She pleases. She is Ichhamai[5].

It is Mahakala that knows the greatness of my Divine Mother – greatness, which is hidden from the view of ordinary beings. Who else can know Her?

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[1] Spirit of Eternity

[2] Muladhara is the first lotus with four petals and is the root of the Sushumna in the spine. The Kundalini is coiled up at the Muladhara lotus.

[3] Sahasrara is the lotus of a thousand petals which is the goal of the spiritual energy (Shakti) awakened by the yogi at the Muladhara. When the Shakti reaches the Sahasrara and becomes united with Shiva or Brahman, the result is samadhi, Brahmajnana.

[4] Finite being

[5] She has Her own way in everything

> My Divine Mother gives birth to the Universe – now think of Her greatness!
>
> Says Prasad [the psalmist]: 'To think that one can know Her is to think that one can swim across the mighty ocean. People can only laugh at the idea.'
>
> I understand this well enough with my mind; alas, my heart does not. It is a dwarf aspiring to reach the moon.

"See, Mother Kali's womb contains the entire universe. How can you know Her greatness? And then it says, 'Even the six schools of philosophy do not reveal Her.' You cannot attain Her by scholarship."

The omnipotence of faith – faith in the Lord and the vilest sin

"You need to have faith, love and devotion for the Lord. Listen to this – how powerful is faith! A person wanted to go across the sea from Ceylon [now Sri Lanka]. Bibhishana said, 'Take this and take care that it is tied to the end of your cloth. This will enable you to walk across the ocean in safety. But mind, never try to open it to look at it, for you will go under the water the moment you open it.' This fellow walked the ocean for some time in perfect safety. Such is the omnipotence of faith. However, after crossing a part of the way, he began to wonder what precious thing Bibhishana had tied to the end of his cloth that could take him across the water. Thinking this, he opened the knot of cloth and found only the name of 'Rama' written on a leaf. He said to himself: Oh, just this! Thinking this, he sank into the water.

"They say that Hanuman had so much faith in the name of Rama that he was able to leap over the sea by virtue of his faith. On the other hand, Rama had to build a bridge to cross it [from the Indian mainland to Sri Lanka].

"If you have faith in Him, even if you commit a sin or the vilest crime, there is no danger."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna assumes the attitude of a devotee and, intoxicated with divine fervour, begins to sing of the great importance of faith –

O Divine Mother, if I die with the name of Durga on my lips,

I shall see, O Shankari[1], how could You not redeem me?

If I kill a cow, or a brahmin, or destroy a child in the womb;

If I indulge in drinking wine and the like, or kill a woman,

For all these sins I care not the least,

As I can raise myself to the exalted position of Brahman.

End of life is to love the Lord

Sri Ramakrishna — Faith and bhakti[2]! One can attain Him easily through love and devotion. He can be grasped through the ecstasy of love[3].

[1] Giver of all good
[2] Love, devotion, prayerfulness and self-surrender
[3] Bhava

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing another song –

O my mind! What are you doing to realize that Being? You are groping about like a mad man in a dark room!

He can be grasped only through ecstatic love; it is impossible to grasp Him otherwise.

Do try your best to bring under your control the moon, which is the doorkeeper at the house (the Microcosm).

In a house are various rooms, among them a vault where the Divine treasure is kept hidden.

Once the moon is under your control, you may, secretly like a thief, work your way to the treasure in the vault and make it your own.

But when the moon is beyond your control and it is daybreak, the treasure in the vault is hidden from you.

Go to the six schools of philosophy. You will not find that Being there! Nor in the *Tantras*[1] or the *Vedas*!

That Being is fond of the sweet syrup of love and dwells within as everlasting joy.

With a view to that love a great yogi practices, one decade after another, meditation for reunion with the Universal Soul.

Once this love springs up in his [the yogi's] heart, he draws the Supreme Being near, much as the loadstone draws the iron.

Says Prasad: 'The Being whom I call my Mother and try to realize, shall I tell Her real name[2]?

Would that not be breaking my (sacred) cooking-pot in the courtyard of the house (or in the market-place) before the eyes of an unfeeling multitude? Guess, O

[1] Religious philosophy identified with the worship of Shakti for the attainment of the Godhead

[2] Brahman of the Vedanta both *Saguna* and *Nirguna*, Personal-Impersonal

my mind, who that Being is, by the hints I have given.'

Thakur in the state of samadhi

As he is singing, Thakur goes into samadhi. His hands are folded, his body is erect and motionless, his eyes unblinking. He sits on the same bench facing west, his legs stretched out. Full of curiosity, everyone watches his wondrous state.

Thakur now returns to normal consciousness. Heaving a deep sigh, he smiles and says, "Feeling and devotion mean to love Him. He who is Brahman I call the Mother."

"Ramprasad asks the mind to guess by a hint. He asks you to understand that He who is called Brahman in the *Vedas* is addressed by him as the Mother. He who is without attributes[1] also has attributes[2]. He who is Brahman is indeed Shakti. When I see Him inactive, I call Him Brahman; and when I think of Him creating, preserving and destroying, I call Him the Primal Power, or Kali.

"Brahman and His Power are inseparable. Example, fire and its burning power. Mention fire, and its power to burn comes to mind. Mention the power to burn, and fire comes to mind. When you accept one, you have accepted the other as well.

"That Being is addressed as the Mother – isn't the Mother a great object of love? If you are able to love the Lord, you will attain Him. Divine feeling, faith, love and devotion are needed! Listen to this song –

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[1] Nirguna
[2] Saguna

The way: faith in the beginning followed by love and devotion

> By meditating on Him, you attain the state of divine feeling.
>
> One gains according to one's feeling – this is the fundamental truth.
>
> If the mind can dip into the reservoir of the nectar of Kali's feet,
>
> Worship, oblations[1], sacrifices and other Vedic rites are of no avail.

" 'The mind can dip' means to love Him intensely. 'The reservoir of nectar' is the lake of immortality. Man does not die when he drowns there. He becomes immortal. Some think that by thinking of God too much, one loses one's sanity. That is not so. He is the lake of immortality. The *Vedas* have declared Him to be 'immortal'. When one plunges into this lake, one does not die but instead becomes immortal."

Karma Yoga and selfless work[2] – helping the world

Sri Ramakrishna and the European ideal of work

"Worship, oblations, sacrifices and such Vedic rites are of no use whatever. When you develop love for Him, all these actions of worship are mostly unnecessary. As long as there is a lack of breeze, there is the need of a fan. But if the southern wind blows, the fan may be put aside. What need is a fan then?

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[1] Homa
[2] *Nishkama* karma

"All the activities you are performing are good. But if you can give up the idea that you are the doer, if you can perform these actions in a selfless way, it would be very good. By performing work in a selfless manner, one gradually develops love and devotion for God. And by continuing to do work without expectation of any reward, one realizes Him.

"However, the more you develop love and devotion for Him, the less work you will have to perform. When the daughter-in-law of the household is in the family way, her mother-in-law reduces her duties. The nearer she approaches her delivery, the less are the duties she is given by her mother-in-law. In the last month of pregnancy, she is given no work lest the childbirth be in jeopardy. (Laughter.) All the work you have undertaken is good. Performing work without any expectation of reward purifies the mind and increases your love for God. It is only by loving Him that you can realize Him. It is not man who does good to the world, it is God Himself who does it. He has created the sun and the moon; He has given affection to the hearts of parents; He has given compassion to the great; He has given devotion to sadhus and devotees. He who works without any selfish desire does good to himself."

The aim of selfless work is God-realization

"There is gold buried within your heart, but you do not yet know it. It is covered by a little mud. Once you discover it, all other activities will be lessened. When the daughter-in-law has given birth to a

child, she is busy with it; she busies herself with the baby alone. Her mother-in-law doesn't let her do household chores. (All laugh.)

"Go forward. A woodcutter went to cut wood. A brahmachari said to him, 'Go forward.' And he saw sandalwood trees when he did. After a few days he remembered that the brahmachari had asked him to go forward, he didn't say to stop at the sandalwood trees. As he went on, he came across a silver mine. And after a few days, when he went still further, he came across a gold mine. Still further, he found diamonds and gems. Gaining all these, he became very wealthy.

"Work without expectation of any reward[1] develops love for God within. Then one attains Him by His grace. One can see the Lord, one can talk to Him the way I am talking to you." (All laugh.)

Chapter VII

Sri Ramakrishna, the ocean of motiveless grace

Everybody is listening to Sri Ramakrishna, still and silent, as though the Goddess Saraswati[2] herself were seated on his tongue and addressing Vidyasagar for the good of humanity. It is 9:00 p.m. Thakur will leave now.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing to Vidyasagar) — I needn't have said all this, for you know it. It is only that you are not aware of it. (Laughter.) In the

[1] *Nishkama* karma
[2] Goddess of knowledge and learning

treasure of the Lord of the ocean[1] are many jewels. But the presiding God of the sea is not aware of them.

Vidyasagar (laughing) — You may say so.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Again you will find that some gentlemen do not even know the names of their domestic servants. (Everybody laughs.) These gentlemen are too important to be on terms of familiarity with the valuables of the house.

Hearing this conversation, everyone is very happy. They are all silent for some time. Addressing Vidyasagar, he speaks again.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Come to the garden once, Rasmani's garden. It's a charming place. So grand! So beautiful!

Vidyasagar — Certainly. You have been so kind to come. Is it not my duty, too, to pay you a visit?

Sri Ramakrishna — Visit to me! Oh, for shame, for shame!

Vidyasagar — But why? Please explain to me.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — We are but fishing boats, small and light and able to travel canals and marshes and also big rivers. But you are a big ship! Who knows but that you may run against a sandbank if you venture there! (All laugh.)

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[1] Varuna

Vidyasagar smiles but says nothing. Thakur laughs.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — But even ships can navigate there at this time.

Vidyasagar (smiling) — Yes, it is the rainy season. (All laugh.)

M. (to himself) — It is the season of the rains of new love. During a new love affair, one does not distinguish between honour and disgrace.

Thakur rises to leave, along with his devotees. Vidyasagar also stands with his relatives and friends. He will see Thakur off in the carriage.

Why does Sri Ramakrishna stand there? He is repeating the seed mantra[1] on his fingers. While doing this, he becomes absorbed in ecstasy – the ocean of motiveless grace as he is. Perhaps he is praying to the Mother for the spiritual welfare of the saintly Vidyasagar before leaving him.

Thakur and the devotees now go downstairs, one of them holding his hand. Vidyasagar leads with his group of friends. He has a lamp in his hand and shows the way. It is the sixth day of the dark fortnight in the lunar month of Shravana. The moon is not yet in the sky. All walk toward the gate through the dark garden in the dim light of the lamp.

Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees reach the gate, where they are struck by a beautiful sight. They see before them a bearded man of fair complexion, 36 or 37 years old, in Bengali dress, a white turban that Sikhs wear, clad in a dhoti, long shirt and socks, but no shoulder cloth. They see that as he comes into the presence of Sri Ramakrishna, he lies prostrate before

[1] Mula mantra

him with his turban on his head. When he rises, Thakur says, "Oh it's you, Balaram! So late at night?"

Balaram (smiling) — I came a long time ago and have been waiting here.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why didn't you come in?

Balaram — Sir, everybody was listening to you. I didn't want to disturb you by going inside. (Saying this, Balaram laughs.)

Thakur gets into the carriage, along with the devotees.

Vidyasagar (sweetly to M.) — Shall I pay the carriage fare?

M. — You needn't worry. It has already been taken care of.

Vidyasagar and the others salute Thakur.

The carriage begins to roll north. Its destination is the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. Those he leaves stand gazing at the carriage even now. They seem to be wondering who this saintly man is who has such an intense love for God and who visits the homes of ordinary beings, telling them that the aim of life is to love God.

Section II

Sri Ramakrishna with the Devotees at Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

'Lust and greed' are indeed obstacles in the path of yoga[1] – practicing spiritual disciplines and the secret of yoga

Sri Ramakrishna is living with devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple. It is Thursday, 24 August 1882, the 10th day of the bright fortnight of Shravana.

These days Hazra, Ramlal, Rakhal and other devotees are staying with Thakur. Ramlal is Thakur's nephew and works as a priest at the Kali Temple. When he arrives, M. sees that Thakur and Hazra are standing on the long northeastern verandah talking. M. prostrates before Thakur and takes the dust of his feet.

Thakur is smiling. He says to M., "I would like to visit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar again. A painter first draws a rough sketch [for the Durga Puja] and later fills in the colours. The image is first made with clay, and then is given a second coat. After that it is plastered and, at last, it is painted with a brush. This is done one step at a time. Iswar Vidyasagar is ready in every aspect, but it is hidden. He has done so much humanitarian work, but he doesn't know what is within himself. Gold lies hidden inside him. When he knows that the Lord resides within, he will give up all his activities and call upon Him with a yearning heart."

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[1] Communion with God

Thakur stands talking to M., sometimes pacing the verandah back and forth.

Spiritual practice – to quell the storm and tempest of 'lust and greed'

Sri Ramakrishna —To know what is inside, a little spiritual practice is needed.

M. — Will one always have to perform spiritual practices?

Sri Ramakrishna — No, in the beginning you must be up and doing, but you don't have to work so hard later on. As long as there are storms, tempests and rough water, the boat has to be steered along zigzag routes; so long does the boatman stand and hold the rudder – but he no longer does so when he is past them. When the boat rounds a bend and a favourable wind blows, he can sit down and relax and just touch the rudder. Then he prepares to hoist the sail and sits down for a smoke. There is peace when the storm and tempest of 'lust and greed' pass.

Sri Ramakrishna and essence of yoga – fall from yoga – state of yoga – steady and unwavering like the flame of a lamp in a windless place – obstacle in yoga

"Some people show signs of yoga. But even they have to be careful. 'Lust and greed' are the obstacles to yoga. They make one deviate from yoga and fall into worldliness – if there is still any desire for sense enjoyment. When this desire is fulfilled, the person will again turn toward the Lord – he

will again attain the state of yoga. Do you know what a '*satka kal*' is, the spring trap for fish?"

M. — No sir, I haven't seen one.

Sri Ramakrishna — You can see it in the countryside. A string with a hook is attached to a bent bamboo pole. Bait is tied to the hook. When a fish swallows the bait, the bamboo stick suddenly springs up. It regains its upright position.

"If you place a weight in one of the pans of a small scale, the lower needle moves away from the upper needle. Man's mind is the lower needle, the Lord is the upper needle. When the lower needle aligns with the upper needle, there is yoga.

"If the mind is restless, yoga is not possible. The wind of the world always distracts the flame of the mind. When the flame does not waver, one attains a perfect state of yoga.

" 'Lust and greed' are obstacles to yoga. You must discriminate: what is there in a woman's body but blood, flesh, fat, intestines, worms, urine, faeces and so on. Why love such a body?

"I used to assume a rajasic attitude in order to renounce worldly things. I developed a craving to put on pure gold-embroidered robes[1], to wear a ring and to smoke the hubble-bubble through a long pipe. I dressed myself in a robe embroidered with pure gold. He (Mathur Babu) bought it for me. After some time I said to my mind, 'Oh mind, so this is a pure gold-embroidered robe!' Then I took it

[1] Sari

off and threw it away – I didn't like it any more. In the same way, I said to myself, 'Oh mind, this is what is known as a shawl and a ring. And this is what is called smoking a hubble-bubble through a long pipe.' When I threw them away, I didn't want to have anything to do with them again.

It is almost dusk. Thakur is talking with Mani alone on the southeastern verandah near the door to his room.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — The mind of a yogi is always fixed on the Lord, ever absorbed in the Atman. You know it as soon as you see his eyes; they gaze in wonder. They look like the eyes of a bird hatching her eggs. Her entire mind is centered on the eggs. She sees outwardly only in name. Can you show me such a picture of a bird?

Mani — I will try to find one, sir.

Chapter II

Conversation between the Guru and the disciple – secret talk

It is already dusk. The lamps in the Kali Temple, the Radhakanta Temple, and all other rooms have been lit by the lamplighter[1]. Thakur is sitting on his smaller cot as he meditates on the Mother of the Universe. Afterwards he repeats the name of the Lord. Incense has been burnt in his room. On one side a light burns on a lamp stand. After awhile, conch shells and bells sound. Arati is being performed

[1] *Faras*

in the Kali Temple. It is the tenth day of the bright fortnight. The moon shines brightly.

A short time after the arati, Sri Ramakrishna, still seated on the smaller cot, talks privately to Mani about different things. Mani sits on the floor.

You have the right to work, but not to its fruit[1]

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — You must work without the expectation of any reward. The work that Iswar Vidyasagar is doing is good. He is trying to perform work selflessly.

Mani — Yes sir. Can one attain the Lord while performing work? Can Rama[2] and kama[3] coexist? The other day I read this Hindi saying:

'Where there is Rama there is no desire, and where there is desire, there is no Rama.'

Sri Ramakrishna — Everybody performs karma. Repeating His name and singing His glories are also work. Even the non-dualists' meditation on 'I am He' is also work. It is work to exhale. There is no way to give up action. So work, but surrender its result to the Lord.

Mani — Sir, is it all right to try to earn more money?

Sri Ramakrishna — You can, if you spend it in spiritual pursuit. You may earn more – but you must make the right use of it. Earning cannot be

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[1] Karmaṇyevādhikāraste mā phaleṣu kadācana. (Gita 2:47)
[2] One of the incarnations of God
[3] Desire

the ideal – the ideal is to serve the Lord. If money is used in the service of the Lord, there is no harm in it.

Mani — Well sir, how long does one have duties toward one's family?

Sri Ramakrishna — Make sure that they are not in want of food and clothing. But there is no need to take your children's burden when they can stand on their own feet. When a young bird learns to find grain for itself, it is pecked away by its mother when it approaches her for food.

Mani — How long must one work?

Sri Ramakrishna — The blossom falls off when the fruit is ripe. When you have attained the Lord, you don't have to work any longer. You won't even want to.

"When a drunkard drinks too much liquor, he loses his senses – but if he has taken two or three drinks, he can carry on with his work. The nearer one advances toward the Lord, the more He lessens one's duties. There is no danger in this. When the daughter-in-law in the family conceives, her mother-in-law gradually reduces her work. In the last month of her pregnancy, the mother-in-law doesn't let her work at all. After the birth of the baby, she remains busy with it all the time.

"One has peace only when one has finished all karma at hand. When a housewife has finished her cooking, the serving of meals and other household

chores, and goes to take her bath, she doesn't return, even if you call for her."

What is meant by attaining the Lord and having His vision? What is the way?

Mani — Sir, what is meant by attaining the Lord? What is a vision of the Lord? What are the means?

Sri Ramakrishna — The Vaishnavas say there are stages on the path to the realization of the Lord. There are beginners[1], aspirants[2], perfected ones[3] and the most perfect of the perfected[4]. He who has just begun to walk the path is a beginner. He who practices spiritual disciplines – worship, japa, meditation and chanting His name – is an aspirant. He who has had the inner experience of God[5] is perfected. The Vedanta illustrates it this way: A gentleman is lying in a dark room. Somebody gropes in the dark to reach him. His hand touches a couch and he says, 'No, this is not he.' Then he touches the window. This is not he. Then he touches the door and again says to himself, 'No, not he.' 'Not this, not this, not this.' At last his hand touches the gentleman. Then he says, 'That's it! Here is the gentleman.' It means that he is now conscious of the gentleman's actual 'existence'. He has reached the gentleman – but he hasn't known him intimately.

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[1] *Pravartaka*
[2] Sadhaka
[3] Siddha
[4] Siddha of the siddhas
[5] *Bodhebodhe*

"There is yet another class, that of the most perfect of the perfect. It is another state to have an intimate acquaintance with the gentleman – to become intimately acquainted with the Lord through love and devotion. The perfect has no doubt attained the Lord, but the most perfect of the perfect has become intimately acquainted with Him.

"You have to establish a specific kind of relationship with the Lord to attain Him: of *shanta*[1], *dasya*[2], *sakhya*[3], *vatsalya*[4] or *madhura*[5].

"*Shanta* – the rishis had this calm attitude. They didn't desire worldly enjoyment. It is also the single-minded devotion[6] of a wife toward her husband. She feels that her husband is the embodiment of beauty and love.

"*Dasya* – this was Hanuman's attitude. He served Rama with the strength of a lion. A wife also has this attitude: she serves her husband from the bottom of her heart. A mother has this attitude to some extent. Yashoda had it.

"*Sakhya* – the attitude of a friend. 'Come, sit beside me.' Sridama and others sometimes gave Sri Krishna a bite from the fruit they were eating and at other times they rode on his shoulders.

"*Vatsalya* – this was Yashoda's attitude. To some extent a wife also has it toward her husband.

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[1] Serene attitude
[2] A servant toward his master
[3] Attitude of a friend
[4] Attitude of a mother toward her child
[5] Attitude of a sweetheart
[6] Nishtha

She feeds him from the bottom of her heart. And she is only satisfied when her son has eaten his fill. Yashoda would wander around with butter in her hand to feed Krishna.

"*Madhura* – as that of Radha. The wife also has this attitude. It includes all other attitudes – *shanta*, *dasya*, *sakhya* and *vatsalya*."

Mani — Does one have the vision of the Lord with these very eyes?

Sri Ramakrishna — He can't be seen by these physical eyes. By practicing spiritual disciplines, one develops a special body of love[1] which has eyes and ears of ecstatic love. One sees Him with these eyes and listens to Him with these ears. Then one even develops a sexual organ of ecstatic love.

Hearing this, Mani laughs boisterously. Thakur is not irritated and continues –

Sri Ramakrishna — One enjoys communion[2] with the Atman by this body of ecstatic love.

Mani again becomes grave.

Sri Ramakrishna — This does not happen without having intense love for God. When one develops intense love, one sees everything filled with God. Just like in severe jaundice everything appears yellow.

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[1] *Prema*: ecstatic love
[2] *Ramana*: romance, lit. intercourse

"It is then that one has the special feeling, 'I am indeed He.' A fellow who is drunk says, 'I am indeed Kali.'

"Intoxicated with ecstatic love, the gopis said, 'I am Krishna.'

"By meditating on God night and day, one sees Him everywhere. Just as after you concentrate on the flame of a lamp, you begin to see flames everywhere."

Is God-realization some mistake of the mind? A doubtful person is ruined[1]

Mani thinks to himself that this flame is not the real flame.

Thakur, who could read a man's mind[2], says, "Nobody can become unconscious by meditating on Consciousness." Shivanath said that the head begins to reel if one meditates on the Lord too much. I said to him, "Can one become unconscious by meditating on Consciousness?"

Mani — Sir, I now understand that. It's not meditation on a transitory object. How can a man become unconscious by meditating on the real Self of eternal Consciousness?

Sri Ramakrishna (happily) — That's His grace. Without His grace, one's doubts do not vanish.

"Without the vision of the Atman, doubts are not dispelled.

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[1] Saṁśayātmā vinaśyati (Gita 4:40)

[2] *Antaryami*

"There is no fear when His grace dawns. A son holding his father's hand can fall down. But if the father holds the son's hand, there is no fear. All difficulties are resolved if, out of His grace, He dispels one's doubts and grants His vision. And if one continues to call upon Him with a heart full of yearning, and continues to practice spiritual disciplines to attain Him, His grace dawns. When a mother sees her child running around restlessly [seeking her], she feels compassion for it. She who was hiding herself, now comes and reveals herself."

Mani is wondering why God makes one run around restlessly. Thakur immediately says, "It is Her will that there should be some running around. Only then is there fun. He has created this universe in sport. That is what Mahamaya is. One must, therefore, take refuge in that Mother, the embodiment of Shakti (Power). One has been bound in the meshes of maya. By tearing its net, one can have the vision of the Lord."

Primal Energy[1], Mahamaya and worship of Shakti

Sri Ramakrishna — To obtain His grace, one must keep the Primal Energy, Shakti, pleased. She Herself is indeed Mahamaya. By enchanting the world, She creates, preserves and dissolves. It is She who has deluded our spiritual awareness. One can enter the door only when She allows us through. When one is outside, one can see only outer objects – one cannot know the Supreme Eternal Person, Sat-chit-ananda[2]. Therefore the *Puranas* state: Brahma and other gods sang hymns

[1] Adyashakti
[2] Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute

of praise to Mahamaya at the time of the assassination of demons Madhu and Kaitabha[1].

"Shakti is at the root of the universe. She includes both knowledge[2] and ignorance[3]. Ignorance deludes and enchants – it leads to 'lust and greed'. On the other hand, love and devotion, compassion, jnana and prema[4], which take one to the Lord, come from knowledge (vidya).

"You have to placate avidya. That is the purpose of the worship of Shakti.

"In order to please Her, there are different attitudes with which to worship Her – the attitude of a handmaid, the heroic attitude, and the attitude of a child.

"The heroic attitude is romantic, having intercourse[5] with Her to please Her.

"'The discipline of the worship of Shakti is very difficult to practice. One cannot deceive or cheat Her.

"I lived for two years in the attitude of a handmaid and companion of the Divine Mother. But my attitude is that of a child to its mother. I look at women's breasts as though they were my mother's.

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[1] Mother, You are the mystic words 'Svaha' and 'Vashat' uttered while performing *homa* and *yajna*. You are Svadha, the mystic word, uttered during observance of *shraddha*.
You are the inmost Self of the mantra. You are the nectar of immortality. O Everlasting One, You are the three lengths of time for pronouncing a vowel sound. (For complete song, see Volume II, Section XIX, Chapter VI)
[2] Vidya
[3] Avidya
[4] Ecstatic love
[5] Ramana

"Every woman is a form of Shakti. In the west [northwest India], a bridegroom holds a knife in his hand at the time of marriage; in Bengal he holds a nutcracker. It means that, with the help of his bride, the embodiment of Shakti, the bridegroom is going to cut the bonds of illusion[1]. This is the heroic attitude. I have never worshipped in this attitude. I have the attitude of a child.

"A bride is the embodiment of Shakti. Haven't you noticed, at a marriage ritual that the bridegroom sits behind like a fool? While the bride sits undaunted!"

One forgets worldly wealth on having God's vision – several branches of knowledge and worldly education – religion and science – sattvic jnana and rajasic jnana

Sri Ramakrishna — After God-realization one forgets His external riches, the glories of His world. On seeing Him, one no longer remembers His riches. When a devotee has lost himself in the Bliss of the Lord, he is rid of all calculation. When one sees Narendra, one doesn't bother to ask, 'What is your name? Where do you live?' Where is the time to ask him such questions? Someone asked Hanuman the date of a particular day. Hanuman replied, 'Brother, I neither know the day of the week, nor the date, nor the constellation of stars. I only meditate on Rama.' "

[1] Maya

Section III

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Dakshineswar Temple on the Vijaya Festival Day

Chapter I

Meditation on the image made of Spirit, and on one's mother

Sri Ramakrishna is staying at the Dakshineswar Temple. It is about 9:00 o'clock. He is resting on the smaller cot and Mani is sitting on the floor talking to him.

It is Sunday, 22 October 1882, the 10th day of the bright fortnight of Aswin – Vijaya day. Rakhal is staying with Thakur these days; Narendra and Bhavanath visit him from time to time. Ramlal, Thakur's nephew, and Hazra are also staying with him. Ram, Manomohan, Suresh, M. and Balaram visit him almost every week. Baburam has visited him only once or twice.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you have [Durga] puja holidays?

Mani — Yes sir. I went to Keshab Sen's house all three days – the seventh, the eighth and the puja day of the ninth.

Sri Ramakrishna — You did indeed!

Mani — I heard a beautiful explanation of Durga Puja from him.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did you hear? Tell me.

Mani — Service was being performed daily at Keshab's house – till ten or eleven. During a service, he gave this explanation of Durga Puja. He said, 'If you attain the Mother, if you can install Mother Durga in the temple of your heart, Goddess Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kartika and Ganesha follow. Lakshmi is wealth; Saraswati is knowledge; Kartika is courage; and Ganesha represents success. All these gods and goddesses arrive of their own accord if the Mother comes.'

Narendra and other intimate disciples of Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna heard a description of Keshab Sen's entire service from Mani; intermittently he asked a few questions. Then he said, "Don't go here and there. Come only here."

"They who are intimately connected with me must only come here. Narendra, Bhavanath and Rakhal are my intimate disciples. They are not ordinary people. Serve them a meal one day. What do you think of Narendra?"

Mani — Very highly, Sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Just see what qualities Narendra has! He sings well, he can play musical instruments, and he is well-educated. He has also conquered his senses. He says he won't marry. His mind has been turned towards God since childhood.

Sri Ramakrishna talks with Mani about other things.

God with form or without form – meditation on image made of spirit, and on one's mother

Sri Ramakrishna — How are you faring in your meditation these days? Do you like God with form or God without form?

Mani — Sir, at present my mind is not drawn to God with form. But, then, I can't concentrate on the formless God either!

Sri Ramakrishna — So, you see? The mind doesn't become concentrated on the formless God in the beginning. At this stage, meditation on God with form is good.

Mani — Is it right to meditate on clay images?

Sri Ramakrishna — Why clay? They are images made of spirit.

Mani — But sir, one still has to think of the hands and feet and so on. On the other hand I say to myself that in the beginning, the mind won't concentrate except on a form – you said so – but He can assume various forms. May one meditate on the form of one's own mother?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, she is the guru[1]. She is the embodiment of the All-Blissful Mother.

Mani is silent, but after awhile he asks Thakur –

[1] Sri Ramakrishna means that the mother should be adored and highly respected

Mani — What do you see when you meditate on the formless God? Can it be described?

Sri Ramakrishna (after a short reflection) — You know what it's like?

Saying this, Thakur is silent. Then he gives a special description of what one experiences when having a vision of God with form as well as the formless God. He pauses again.

Sri Ramakrishna — The fact is that you need to practice spiritual disciplines to understand. If you want to take jewels from a locked room, you have to make some effort to find the key to open the lock. Then you can remove the jewels from it. If you just stand before a locked room thinking, 'I have now opened the door, now broken the strong-box and now taken the jewels out' – such reflection is of no avail. One must practice spiritual disciplines.

Chapter II

God is infinite and so is Thakur – all are paths – visit to Vrindavan

The jnani believes in infinite incarnations of God – aspirant who doesn't desire to move around[1] – why pilgrimages?

Sri Ramakrishna — Jnanis meditate on the formless God. They don't believe in the incarnation of God. Arjuna sang a hymn of praise to Sri Krishna, 'You are Brahman Absolute.' Krishna said

[1] Kutichaka: an aspirant who settles down peacefully at one place on an *asana*

to him, 'Would you like to see whether or not I am the Absolute Brahman? Come with me.' Saying this, he took Arjuna to a particular place and said, 'What do you see?' Arjuna said, 'I see a big tree with clusters of fruit similar to black berries.' Krishna said, 'Come closer and you will see that these are not clusters of black fruit. Innumerable clusters of Krishnas, like me, are hanging there. That is to say, the same tree of the Absolute Brahman yields numberless incarnations of God.'

"Kavirdas was inclined to believe in the formless God. Referring to Krishna, he would remark, 'How can I meditate on him? The milkmaids used to clap while he danced like a monkey.' (Smiling) I am a believer in God with form when I am with those who believe in God with form. And I am a believer in the formless God when I am with those who hold this belief."

Mani (smiling) — You, too, are infinite, like Him of whom we are talking. It is impossible to limit you.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — You have understood! Do you know what one should do? One should practice the disciplines of all religions. One should tread each of their paths. Does a piece in Indian chess reach home unless it moves to all the squares? When it reaches home, no other piece can overtake it.

Mani — That is true.

Sri Ramakrishna — There are two classes of yogis: the *vahudakas* and the *kutichakas*. The sadhu who

visits many places of pilgrimage and hasn't yet attained peace of mind is a *vahudaka*. But the yogi who has stilled his mind after visiting several places, who has found peace of mind, fixes an asana[1] for himself and doesn't move from it. He feels joy only when he sits at that same place. He doesn't feel the need to go on pilgrimage. If he goes to holy places at all, it is to get inspiration.

"I had to practice disciplines of all the religions: Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. I also followed the paths of the Shaktas, Vaishnavas, Vedantists and other sects. I saw that it was the same Lord toward whom everybody was moving. Only their paths were different.

"I have gone on pilgrimages, but one time I suffered a great deal. I went with Mathur's family to Kashi and was sitting in Raja Babu's drawing room. They were all talking about worldly affairs – about money, land, and what not. Hearing them, I began to weep. I said, 'Divine Mother, where have you brought me? I was much better off at Dakshineswar.' In Prayag I saw that the pond, the durva grass, plants, and the tamarind leaves were all the same as here! The only difference was that the excreta of the people of the west [Uttar Pradesh, west of Bengal] appeared like husk[2]. (Thakur and Mani laugh.)

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[1] Meditation seat

[2] Kashi and Allahabad are both in Uttar Pradesh, which is west of Bengal (Dakshineswar). Thakur is saying that there is no difference in locality, there is only difference in regard to worldly people (such as he saw in Raja Babu's drawing room) and those interested in God; i.e. what one takes in, one gives out: if one is only concerned with coarse, worldly things, one expresses what is coarse.

"Undoubtedly one gets inspiration in a place of pilgrimage. I went to Vrindavan with Mathur Babu. In the party were ladies of Mathur Babu's family and also Hriday. Just seeing the Kaliyadaman ghat, I felt inspired and was overwhelmed with divine emotion. Hriday used to bathe me at this ghat of the Jamuna as one bathes a child.

"In the evening I would go for a stroll on the bank of the Jamuna. Cows would be returning from pasture, coming across the sandbank of the Jamuna. Just seeing them, I was inspired with Krishna. I began to run around like an intoxicated person, crying, 'Where are you Krishna, where …'

"I went to Shyamkunda and Radhakunda in a palanquin. I got down from it to see Mount Govardhan. No sooner did I see it than I was overwhelmed with divine emotion. I ran to the top of it and lost external consciousness. Then the residents of Vraja carried me down. I was overwhelmed with divine emotion to see the plains, the plants, trees and deer on the way to Shyamkunda and Radhakunda. My clothes became wet with tears. I said to myself, 'Oh Krishna! Everything is here – but I am not able to find you!' I sat in the palanquin without the strength to utter a word. I sat quietly. Hriday, following the palanquin, told the palanquin bearers to be very careful.

"Gangama was leading a highly spiritual life. She was very old and lived alone in a hut near Nidhuvan. Seeing my spiritual state and ecstasy, she said, 'He is the very embodiment of Radha.' She

called me 'dulali[1]'. Being with her, I forgot everything – to eat, or to return home. Hriday sometimes brought food from home to feed me. Gangama also prepared some food for me.

"Gangama used to go into ecstasy. People would gather to watch her in her ecstatic state. Once she climbed up on Hriday's shoulders in a state of ecstasy.

"I didn't feel like leaving Gangama and returning to Calcutta. Arrangements were made for me to stay with her. I was to eat double-boiled rice. Gangama would have her bedding on one side of the room and I on the other. All this was arranged. Hriday then said, 'You are suffering badly from indigestion. Who will look after you?' Gangama said, 'Why, I will look after him! I will nurse him.' Hriday pulled me toward him by one hand and Gangama dragged me toward her by the other. Just then I was reminded of my mother. She was staying all alone in the Nahabat at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. Thus I could not stay. I said, 'No, I shall have to return.'

"There is such a nice spiritual atmosphere in Vrindavan. When new pilgrims arrive, the boys of Vraja say, 'Repeat the name of the Lord and open your purse!' "

About eleven o'clock Sri Ramakrishna takes the prasad[2] of Mother Kali. After relaxing for awhile at midday, he spends the afternoon in conversation with the devotees. Now and then he utters, "Om," or "Ha, Chaitanya!"

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[1] A dear little girl
[2] Sacramental food

Evening arati[1] has been performed in the shrine. It is Vijaya Day – Sri Ramakrishna comes to the Kali Temple. After he has paid his obeisance to the Mother, the devotees take the dust of his feet. Ramlal has performed the arati of Mother Kali. Sri Ramakrishna calls out to him, "Hey, Ramlal. Where is it?"

An offering of Indian hemp[2] has been made to Mother Kali. Sri Ramakrishna calls Ramlal because he wishes to touch the consecrated hemp with his hand. He asks him to distribute a little to every devotee.

Chapter III

At the Dakshineswar Kali Temple with Balaram and other devotees – instructions to Balaram

Physical signs – speaking the truth – harmony of religions – 'lust and greed' constitute maya[3]

It is Tuesday afternoon, 24 October, the time about 3:00 or 4:00 o'clock. Thakur is standing close to the food-shelf. Balaram and M. have arrived from Calcutta in a carriage and have made obeisance to him. When they sit down after saluting him, Thakur says with a smile, "I came to take some food from the shelf. No sooner did I touch the food with my hand than a lizard fell on my body[4]! I immediately pulled my hand back." (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna — Oh, yes! You must believe in all these things. Just see, Rakhal is suffering, and

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[1] Singing devotional songs together with the waving of lights before the sacred images
[2] Siddhi
[3] Nescience
[4] The dropping of a lizard is believed to be a bad omen

I, too, feel pain in my limbs. Do you know what's the matter? When I was leaving my bed, I saw[1] a certain person's face and thought that Rakhal was coming! (All laugh.) Oh, yes! You must notice all these physical signs. Narendra brought a friend who was blind in one eye – not totally blind. However, I said to myself, 'Just by chance Narendra has brought such trouble with him!'

"There is a certain person who visits here, but I can't eat any of the food he brings. He works in an office on a salary of twenty rupees a month – and earns an extra twenty rupees by submitting fraudulent bills. He tells lies. I don't talk to him very long. Sometimes he doesn't go to his office for three or four days and stays here. Do you know why? He wants to get another job through my recommendation."

Balaram belongs to a family of devout Vaishnavas. His father, an old man, is a pious devotee. He has a tuft of hair on his head and wears a string of tulsi beads around his neck; he constantly repeats the name of the Lord on his rosary. The family has a big estate in Orissa. Besides, they have built shrines to Radha-Krishna in Kothar, Vrindavan and many other places, where worship and service of the deities is performed. They have built [free] guesthouses there as well. Balaram is a recent visitor to Sri Ramakrishna, who imparts instructions to him during the course of conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna — A certain person visited me the other day. I hear that he may be a slave to his hag of a wife. Why doesn't one see God? The reason is

[1] Orthodox Hindus believe that the first face in the morning indicates whether the day will be good or bad

that 'lust and greed' form a veil. How could he say in your presence, 'A paramahamsa[1] visited my father and my father cooked a chicken for him!' (Balaram laughs.) I am in such a spiritual state that I can only eat a little fish gravy if it is first offered to the Divine Mother. But I can't eat meat offered to the Mother. I only taste it with the tip of my finger, lest the Mother should be cross with me. (All laugh.)

His earlier story – on the way to Burdwan – journeys through his native countryside – he hears Nakur Acharya's songs

"Well, can you explain the state of my mind? I was going to my village [Kamarpukur] by bullock cart from Burdwan. Suddenly a storm arose and it began to rain heavily. A group of people came and gathered around the cart. My companions told me they were dacoits. So I began to repeat the Lord's name. Sometimes I repeated Rama's name, sometimes Kali's, and then Hanuman's. I repeated all these names. What do you think of this?"

> Is Sri Ramakrishna hinting that there is but one God with numberless names; that followers of different religions and sects quarrel with each other in vain?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Balaram) — Maya is only 'lust and greed'. By living in the midst of them for a few days, one loses spiritual awareness but feels that all is well. A scavenger carries a pot of excreta and in course of time, doesn't feel any repulsion for it. One gradually acquires love and devotion for God

[1] Orthodox Hindus are forbidden to eat chicken, or meat

by practicing the chanting of the Lord's name and glories.

(To M.) — One should not be ashamed of repeating the Lord's name. One does not succeed as long as one has these three: shame, hatred and fear.

"They sing very nice kirtans in that part of the country. They sing them to the accompaniment of a drum. The song of Nakur Acharya is wonderful indeed. (To Balaram) Don't you have a temple in Vrindavan where worship and service to the deity is performed?"

Balaram — Yes, sir. We have a grove where Krishna[1] is worshipped.

Sri Ramakrishna — I have been to Vrindavan. Nidhu grove is a very nice place.

[1] Shyam Sunder

Section IV

Sri Ramakrishna on the Main Road to Calcutta with his Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna leaves the Dakshineswar Kali Temple by carriage. He is on his way to Calcutta, accompanied by Ramlal and a couple of devotees. As soon as he is out of the gate, he sees M. approaching on foot with four *fazli*[1] mangoes in his hand. He asks for the carriage to stop. Mani salutes him, placing his head on the carriage.

Saturday, 21 July 1883, the first day of the dark fortnight of Ashada. It is about four o'clock. Thakur is going to Adhar's home, then to Jadu Mallick's and, last of all, to Khelat Ghosh's.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to Mani) — Why don't you come with us? We're going to Adhar Sen's home.

Saying, "As you wish," M. gets into the carriage.

Mani is English-educated and did not formerly believe in samskaras, but a few days ago he admitted to Thakur that the reason Adhar had so much love and devotion[2] for him was because of his samskaras[3]. However, when he returned home and thought about it, he decided that he still did not have full faith in the idea of inherited tendencies of past lives. It is to

[1] A species of mango grown in Malda
[2] Bhakti
[3] Tendencies inherited from one's past births

tell Thakur this that he has come to see him today. Thakur speaks.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, what do you think of Adhar?

Mani — Sir, he has great love for you.

Sri Ramakrishna — Adhar thinks very highly of you.

Mani is silent for awhile. Then he raises the subject of past life samskaras.

One understands nothing of God – very secret talk

Mani — I don't have much faith in the idea of previous life samskaras. Will it retard my love and devotion to God in any way?

Sri Ramakrishna — It is enough to have the faith that everything is possible in His creation. Don't allow the idea to come to your mind that what you think is the only truth and that what everyone else thinks is false. Then God Himself will make you understand.

"How can a man understand His activities? They are limitless. Don't even try to understand them. I have heard that anything is possible in His creation. So instead of worrying about these things, I only meditate on God. One day Hanuman was asked the date. He said, 'I don't know either the day or the position of the stars. I only contemplate Rama.'

"Can one ever understand His works? God is so near to us – yet we don't know Him. Balaram did not recognize Krishna as the Lord."

Mani — Yes, sir. You said the same thing about Bhishma Deva.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, yes. Please tell me what I said about him.

Mani — Bhishma Deva wept as he lay on a bed of arrows. The Pandavas said to Sri Krishna, 'Brother, how strange this is! So spiritually wise is our grandfather[1] and yet he weeps at the thought of death.' Sri Krishna replied, 'Please ask him why he is crying.' Bhishma said, 'I am crying because I fail to understand anything of God doings. Krishna, you accompany the Pandavas wherever they go, protecting them at every step. Even then, there is no end to their troubles.'

Sri Ramakrishna — God has hidden everything with His maya. He doesn't let you understand anything. 'Lust and greed' constitute maya. Only he who removes the veil of maya can behold His vision. I was explaining to somebody that God is truly amazing, when He suddenly showed me a pond in the countryside (Kamarpukur). A person pushed aside the green scum covering the surface and drank the water below. The water was as clear as crystal. This showed that Sat-chit-ananda is covered by the maya of 'green scum'. Only he who can remove the scum can have His vision.

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[1] *Pitamah*

"Listen – I'll tell you a great secret. While I was answering the call of nature in the Jhautala (willow grove), I saw in front of me something that looked like the door of a secret chamber. I couldn't see what was inside it. I tried to make a hole with a nail knife, but I couldn't. The moment I would make a hole, the earth would fall back and fill it up. At long last I was able to make a big opening."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna paused. After awhile, he says, "These are lofty spiritual matters. Look, somebody is pressing my mouth to stop me from divulging them."

"I saw with my own eyes God's presence in the female genital organ. I saw Him once in the mating of a dog and a bitch."

"The universe is conscious on account of God's Consciousness. At times I see His Consciousness flashing in small fish."

The carriage reaches the Darmahata crossing at Shovabazar. Thakur adds –

"Sometimes I see the universe permeated with Consciousness just as the earth is soaked with rain water.

"Though I have seen so much, I am not puffed up with pride."

Mani (with a smile) — For you to speak of pride!

Sri Ramakrishna — Truly, I swear to you that I never feel the least pride.

Mani — There was a man in Greece by the name of Socrates. A voice from heaven announced that he was the wisest of all men. Socrates was amazed. He reflected on it a long time in solitude before he understood. Then he told his friends, 'Now I have understood that I know nothing.' People think they have gained so much knowledge. The fact is that all men are ignorant.

Sri Ramakrishna — Now and then I say to myself, 'What do I know that so many people visit me?' Vaishnavcharan was a great pundit. He used to say, 'Whatever you say tallies with the scriptures. Then why do I visit you? I want to hear it from your lips.'

Mani — All your words tally with the scriptures. Navadvip Goswami in Panihati also said that the other day. You said, 'By repeating the words 'Gita' a number of times, it becomes '*tyagi*[1]'. Actually it gets reversed to '*tagi*', but Navadvip Goswami said that '*tagi*' and '*tyagi*' convey the same meaning. They are both derived from the root 'tag'.

Sri Ramakrishna — Does anyone resemble me – any pundit or sadhu?

Mani — God has made you with His own hands, but He has made others by machine – according to the law of creation.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing, to Ramlal and others) — Hello! See what he says!

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[1] Man of renunciation

Thakur's laughter continues. At last he says, "Truly, I swear, I don't feel the least pride."

Mani — Education does one good thing in that one realizes: I know nothing and I am nothing.

Sri Ramakrishna — True, very true. I am nothing, I am nothing indeed. Well, do you believe in Western astronomy?

Mani — According to it, new discoveries can be made. Noting the irregular movement of Uranus, with the help of a telescope, the brightly shining new planet Neptune has been discovered. And a new calculation can be made about the eclipse.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, it is possible.

The carriage is rolling on and has almost reached Adhar's house. Thakur says to Mani –

"Stick to truth. It will lead to God-realization."

Mani — And you said yet another thing to Navadvip Goswami, 'O Lord, I want You! See that You do not enchant me by the splendour of Your world-bewitching maya. I want You!'

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes. This is what one must say sincerely.

Chapter II

In the joy of devotional songs[1] at Adhar Sen's house

Sri Ramakrishna has come to Adhar Sen's house. Ramlal, M., Adhar and many other devotees are seated near him in the parlour. Three or four people of the neighbourhood have come to see Thakur. Rakhal lives with his father in Calcutta.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Adhar) — Have you not informed Rakhal that I was coming?

Adhar — Yes sir, I told him.

Noticing Thakur's eagerness to see Rakhal, Adhar sends a man in his carriage to fetch him, though he does not mention it.

Adhar sits close to Thakur. He was very eager to see Thakur today, but such a visit was not planned. He has arrived by the Lord's will.

Adhar — You haven't been here for such a long time! I cried for you today, shedding tears.

Sri Ramakrishna (happily, smiling) — Did you really?

It is already dusk. The parlour has been lit. Thakur folds his hands and pays his obeisance to the Mother of the Universe; perhaps he mentally repeats the *mulamantra*[2]. Now he chants the Name in a sweet voice: Govinda, Govinda, Sat-chit-ananda, Haribol! Haribol! Repeating the holy Name, he showers nectar

[1] Kirtan

[2] An esoteric word or words of great power repeated during prayer and meditation

all around. The devotees drink the nectar of the Name, speechless with wonder. Ramlal now sings –

You have enchanted the whole world, O Mother. You, the enchantress of Shiva Himself.

O Mother, sitting on the great lotus in the Muladhara, You enjoy Yourself, playing the vina[1].

In the machine of the human body, You manifest Yourself. With Your great mantra, You pierce the three gunas which reside in the three nadis, or nerves, of the Sushumna, Ida and Pingala.

You provide energy to the three musical scales.

You abide in the six-petalled lotus of Svadhisthana as Bhairava musical mode[2].

You illuminate as Mallhar[3] raga in the Manipura and as the Vasanta[4] raga in the lotus of the heart.

You reside as Hindola musical mode in the Vishuddha chakra, and in the Ajna lotus as eardrum. You pierce the seventy-three melodies with the three octaves: keynote, metre and tempo.

O Mahamaya, you easily bind all creatures with the net of infatuation.

You become absorbed in the Supreme Consciousness and establish there as lightning.

Nanda Kumar says: who knows for certain what Your quintessence is? But you sing like the cuckoo and Your essence is the three gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas.

Ramlal sings another song –

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[1] A stringed musical instrument
[2] Raga
[3] Indian musical mode of rainy season
[4] An Indian musical mode

O Bhavani, I have heard Your fear-dispelling Name, so I have placed my burden on You this time. Redeem me or not, as You wish.

You, O Mother, hold the entire universe, and You are immanent in it. Who knows whether you are Kali or Radha?

O Mother, You dwell in all beings. As Kundalini, You abide in the Muladhara lotus of four petals.

You rise through the Sushumna and reach the Vajrasana[1] of the six-petalled lotus of Svadhisthana.

Then O Divine Mother, You go upward to the ten-petalled blue lotus of the Manipura centre at the navel.

O Mother, the begetter, You live among the lotuses on the path of the Sushumna. O Lady of lotuses!

Above it, there is the charming red lotus with twelve petals in the reservoir of nectar. If you open it with Your lotus feet, all darkness of the heart is dispelled.

Above that, in the region of the throat is the smoke-hued sixteen-petalled lotus of the void, the source of water.

When this void is experienced, the universe is dissolved in the Void.

Above it, at the forehead, is the two-petalled lotus. When the mind remains ever lodged there, staying on the two petals, it wants to witness the sport of existence.

Above this centre, at the top of the head at a most charming spot, is the thousand-petalled lotus. There the Supreme Shiva Himself dwells.

O Mother, You abide there near Shiva as Primeval Energy, a woman who has conquered the senses. The great yogis and munis meditate on You as the daughter of the Lord of the mountains.

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[1] A centre in the Sushumna

You are the Shakti of Shiva. Pray destroy my cravings so that I am not born again in this world.

O Mother, You are Primordial Power. You are the five elements[1], and You are also beyond the five elements.

You take a form for the sake of the devotees in the creation, and You are indeed formless even when the five elements are dissolved.

Vision of Formless Sat-chit-ananda[2] – piercing the six spiritual centres and attainment of samadhi

Ramlal sings –

Above it in the region of the throat is the smoke-hued sixteen-petalled lotus of a void, the source of water.

When this void is experienced, the universe is dissolved in the Void.

Sri Ramakrishna then says to M., "Listen, this is known as the vision of the formless Sat-chit-ananda. When the Vishuddha centre is pierced, one sees all as *akasa*[3]."

M. — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — After crossing over the maya of the universe and created beings, one reaches the Nitya[4]. Passing beyond the sound *nada*[5], one attains samadhi. While practicing the spiritual discipline of repeating 'Om,' one goes beyond the *nada* sound and attains samadhi.

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[1] Earth, water, fire, air and ether
[2] Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute
[3] Ether, the subtlest of the five elements, the vehicle of life and sound
[4] The Absolute
[5] This sound rises from the navel and originates in the Supreme Brahman

Chapter III

Jadu Mallick's house – before Goddess Simhavahini – in samadhi

Adhar treats Thakur to fruits and sweets in his house. Thakur says, "I have to go to Jadu Mallick's house today."

Thakur arrives at Jadu Mallick's house. It is the first lunar day of the dark fortnight in the month of Ashada. The night is bathed in moonlight. Thakur comes with the devotees to the room in which Goddess Simhavahini is daily worshipped. Having been adorned with sandal paste, garlands and flowers, the Mother looks supremely graceful. A priest is sitting in front of Her. A lamp is lighted in front of the image. Thakur asks one of his intimate companions to offer a rupee to the Goddess and salute Her; it is a Hindu custom to make an offering when one visits a deity.

Thakur stands before the Goddess Simhavahini with folded hands. Behind him the devotees also stand with folded hands.

Thakur looks a long time at the Goddess.

How wonderful! While looking at Her, he suddenly passes into samadhi. He stands there motionless, like an image of stone, without blinking.

After a long time he exhales a long breath. His samadhi breaks. He says, as if drunk, "Mother, I am bidding good-bye." But he cannot move. He stands there in the same mood.

Next he says to Ramlal, "Sing that song. Then I will be restored to normal." Ramlal sings, "You have enchanted the whole world, O Mother. You, the enchantress of Shiva Himself."

The song comes to an end.

Now, accompanied by the devotees, Thakur walks toward the parlour. On his way, he says, "Mother, please dwell in my heart!"

Jadu Mallick is seated with his friends in the parlour. Thakur is still in a divine mood. As he enters, he sings –

O Mother, ever blissful as Thou art,

Do not deprive me of bliss[1].

As the song ends, he says to Jadu, still intoxicated in the same spiritual mood, "Tell me, sir, what shall I sing?" Shall I sing this song, "Am I a weakling, delivered in the eighth month of conception?" Saying this, Thakur sings –

Song –

Mother, am I your eight-month[2] old son?

I am not afraid of Your eyes shot red with anger.

Your red feet are my wealth – the same feet Shiva keeps on His breast.

Whenever I ask for Your wealth, I am put off by deceit.

I have put away in my heart Shiva's hand-written deed.

This time I am going to take my case to the Lord's court and win it by just one submission.

I'll make You see how a son can fight a case.

Says Ramprasad, 'When a son goes to court against his mother, it is so exciting!'

I will be pacified only when You take me in Your arms to quiet me.

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[1] For complete song, refer Volume I, Section XIV, Chapter Three

[2] A premature child delivered in eighth month of conception who is generally weak

The lawsuit between the Mother and son shall gain great momentum, says Ramprasad.

I shall only rest when the Mother, having pardoned me, raises me in Her arms.

When his mood comes down a little, he says, "I will eat the Divine Mother's prasad."

Mother Simhavahini's prasad is given to Thakur.

Jadu Mallick is sitting with a number of his friends and relatives on chairs close to Thakur. Some of them are flatterers.

Thakur sits on a chair facing Jadu Mallick and talks with him in a happy mood. Some of Thakur's devotees are in an adjacent room. M. and a couple of devotees sit near him.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Well, why do you keep court jesters with you?

Jadu (smiling) — Won't you redeem them even if they are?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — The Ganges doesn't purify wine casks that float in it!

Sticking to truth and Sri Ramakrishna – a man must keep his word

Jadu had promised Thakur that he would arrange for a recital of the Chandi in his house. Many days have elapsed, but the recital has not taken place.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, what about the recital of the Chandi?

Jadu — I was busy with so many engagements, I couldn't arrange for it.

Sri Ramakrishna — What! A man has to keep his word!

"The words of a man and an elephant's tusks do not go back.

"A man must keep his word. What do you say?"

Jadu (smiling) — That is so.

Sri Ramakrishna — You are a calculating man. You calculate profit and loss before you start a work. A brahmin's cow must eat little, produce a lot of cow dung, and yield pails of milk. (All laugh.)

Thakur says to Jadu after awhile, "I now understand your nature. You are like the stone of Ramjiwanpur, half of which is hot and the other half cold. You have your mind on the Lord and also in the world."

Thakur eats the prasad of the Divine Mother – fruits and sweets – along with the devotees. Now he leaves to go to Khelat Ghosh's house.

Chapter IV

Auspicious visit at Khelat Ghosh's house – instruction to a Vaishnava

Sri Ramakrishna enters Khelat Ghosh's house about ten at night. The house and its big courtyard are bathed in moonlight. As he enters the house, Thakur passes into a spiritual mood. Ramlal, M. and a couple of devotees are with him. There are rooms on all four sides of the big courtyard. The inner apartments are

reached by climbing two flights of stairs and walking some distance through a verandah to the south, then turning east, and again some distance to the west.

It looked like there was nobody in the house, in the big rooms, or the long verandah in front.

Thakur is taken to the northeastern room and given a seat. He is still in ecstasy. The devotee who lives in the house and who had invited Thakur comes in to greet him. He is a Vaishnava; his body is marked with sandal paste, and he carries a small rosary bag. He is old. He is a relative of Khelat Ghosh. He sometimes visits Dakshineswar to see Thakur, though some Vaishnavas are very narrow-minded and disparage Shaktas and jnanis. Thakur now talks.

Sri Ramakrishna's harmony of religions – the Religion of Love

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Vaishnava devotee and others) — It's not right to think that only my religion is right and all others are wrong. There is but one God, one without a second. Different people call Him by various names. Some call Him God, others Allah, some call Him Krishna, some Shiva, and some Brahman. Say there is a reservoir containing water. At one of its bathing ghats people call it *jal*, at another water, and at yet another *pani*. Hindus call it *jal*, Christians call it water, and Muslims call it *pani*. Yet there is only one substance. As many religions, so many paths – every religion is a path which leads to the Lord. It is like rivers coming from different directions but uniting in the same ocean.

"Sat-chit-ananda is the only truth established in the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and the *Tantras*. In the

Vedas, He is Sat-chit-ananda Brahman; in the *Puranas* Sat-chit-ananda Krishna, Ram and so on; and in the Tantra, He is Sat-chit-ananda Shiva. Sat-chit-ananda Brahman, Sat-chit-ananda Krishna and Sat-chit-ananda Shiva are one and the same."

They all sit silent.

The Vaishnava Devotee — Sir, why should I meditate on God?

Instructions to the Vaishnava – who is a *jivanmukta*[1]? Who is a superior devotee? Signs of one who has had His vision

Sri Ramakrishna — If one truly has this understanding, one is already liberated in his lifetime. But not everybody has such faith. They only talk. Worldly people have heard that God exists and everything happens by His will. But they don't have faith in it.

"Do you know what the God of worldly people is like? Like children who swear by God while quarrelling. They have heard the word from their elderly aunts who are quarrelling.

"Can everybody understand Him? He has created good people as well as bad, devotees as well as non-devotees. He has created believers in God and non-believers. There is such variety in His sport! There is a greater manifestation of His Power at one place than another. There is a greater reflection of the light of the sun on water than on

[1] One liberated in this very life

the earth, and again there is more of its reflection in a mirror than on water.

"Besides, there are classes of devotees: superior devotees, mediocre devotees and inferior devotees. The *Gita* speaks of all this."

The Vaishnava — True, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — The inferior devotee says, 'God exists up there in the sky very far away.' The mediocre devotee says, 'God is present in all beings as Consciousness, as life.' The superior devotee says, 'God Himself has become everything. All that I see are the different forms of God. He Himself has become maya[1], the universe and living beings – nothing exists apart from Him.'

Sri Ramakrishna — One does not attain this state unless one has seen God. But there are signs of whether a man has attained His vision. Sometimes he laughs, weeps, dances, or sings like a mad man. Sometimes he behaves like a child – like a five-year old child: guileless, generous, without vanity, not attached to anything, not subject to any of the gunas and always blissful. At other times he behaves like a ghoul: he does not discriminate between purity and impurity; he sees no difference between right conduct and wrong. Or at times he becomes inert, as if he had the glimpse of something unique. So he cannot do any work; he is not able to strive for anything.

[1] Nescience

Is Sri Ramakrishna referring to all the states he has gone through?

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Vaishnava devotee) — 'You and Yours' comes from spiritual knowledge[1]; the feeling of 'I and mine' is ignorance.

"Oh Lord, You are the doer, I am a non-doer – this is Knowledge. Oh Lord, all belongs to You – body, mind, home, family, the universe and its living beings – they are all Yours, nothing belongs to me. This feeling is Knowledge.

"An ignorant man says, 'The Lord exists there, very far away.' The man of Knowledge[2], on the other hand, knows that the Lord exists 'here, here indeed,' so very near, within the heart, as the *antaryami*[3]. And that He has assumed each of the various forms that are."

[1] Jnana
[2] Jnani
[3] The Inner Controller

Section V

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar Temple with Devotees

Chapter I

Instructions to Manimohan[1] – signs of the vision of Brahman – yoga of meditation[2]

Sri Ramakrishna, seated on the smaller cot, is meditating inside the mosquito net. It is seven or eight o'clock at night. M. is seated on the floor. Hari Babu, one of his friends, has come with him. It is Monday, 20 August 1883, the second day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravana.

Hazra is living at Dakshineswar these days. Rakhal is often there too, though he sometimes stays with Adhar Sen. Narendra, Bhavanath, Adhar, Balaram, Ram, Manomohan, M. and others visit overnight almost every week.

Hriday, who had been of great service to Thakur, is now ill at his village home. Thakur is very anxious to hear about him. A devotee gave ten rupees to Ram Chatterji to send to Hriday, but Thakur was not present and does not know about it. This devotee has brought a tumbler, having been asked by Thakur, "Bring a tumbler for drinking water for the devotees' use."

Hari Babu, M.'s friend, lost his wife some eleven years ago; he has not remarried. He serves his father, mother, brother and sister, for whom he has great love and affection. He is twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old. Thakur comes out of his

[1] Referring to M.
[2] Dhyana Yoga, or communion with God by meditation

mosquito net when the devotees arrive and take their seats. M. and the other devotees prostrate to salute him. The mosquito net is now removed from the cot. Sitting on the smaller cot, Thakur talks to them.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I was meditating inside the mosquito net. I thought to myself that God is only a form one imagines during meditation, so I didn't enjoy it. One is successful when God reveals Himself all of a sudden – in a flash. So then I said to myself, 'Who is it that meditates, and on whom does he meditate?'

M. — Yes, sir. You said that He Himself has become everything – the universe and its living beings. That even he who meditates is also God.

Sri Ramakrishna — And one cannot do anything unless He makes one do it. One meditates only when God makes it possible for one to meditate. What is your opinion?

M. — Sir, there is no 'I-consciousness' in you, that is why you feel this way. Only he who has no ego has this understanding.

Sri Ramakrishna — But it is good to retain this much ego: 'I am His servant.' As long as one thinks that one does anything, the attitude 'I am your servant and you are my Master' is good. It is good to cherish the relationship of servant and Master when one feels that one is performing activities.

Manimohan [M.] continually reflects on the nature of the Supreme Brahman. Thakur talks to him about it.

Sri Ramakrishna — Brahman[1] is like *akasa*[2], without any modification. It is like fire, which has no colour. Only by His Power has He taken up various forms. Sattva, rajas and tamas are the three qualities of God's Power. If you put something white in fire, it appears white; if you put something red, it appears red; if black, the fire appears black. Brahman is beyond the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. What He is cannot be expressed in words – He is beyond speech. What remains when you continue the practice of saying, 'Not this, not this[3]' is the essence of Bliss, is Brahman.

"The husband of a young girl has arrived and is sitting with other young men of his age in the outer room. The girl and her companions of the same age are peeping through the grill of a window. The companions don't know her husband, so they ask her, 'Is that your husband?' The girl smiles a little and says, 'No.' Pointing to another person, the girls ask, 'Is that one your husband?' She again says, 'No.' Again they point at a third person and ask her, 'Is that your husband?' She again says, 'No.' At last they point to her husband and ask, 'Is that your husband?' Then the girl says neither 'yes' nor 'no' – she only smiles suddenly with a short catch of her breath; she remains silent. Her companions then know that he is her husband. When one attains the knowledge of Brahman, one becomes silent."

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[1] The Absolute
[2] Ether
[3] Neti, neti

Company of the holy – duties of a householder

(To Mani) "Well, why do I talk so much?"

Mani — You talk to awaken the spiritual consciousness of the devotees. You yourself say that if one puts unbaked *luchi*[1] in boiling ghee, it makes a sizzling sound.

Thakur talks about Hazra to M.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you know what the nature of a saintly person is? He doesn't hurt anybody, he doesn't harass anybody. Some people have such a nature that, when invited to a feast, they say they would like a special seat. If one has genuine love and devotion for the Lord, one does not take a false step, does not give trouble to others for nothing.

"It is not right to keep the company of bad people. You must keep some distance from them. You must save yourself from them. (To Mani) What do you say?"

Mani — Sir, the company of wicked people brings the mind way down. But, as you say, it is different with heroes.

Sri Ramakrishna — How is that?

Mani — If you throw a stick into a fire burning feebly, it goes out. But when the fire is blazing, you may throw a plantain tree into it and nothing

[1] Fried bread

happens to the fire – though the tree is burnt to ashes.

Sri Ramakrishna asks M. about his friend Hari Babu.

M. — He has come to see you. His wife died a long time ago.

Sri Ramakrishna [to Hari Babu] — What are you doing these days?

M. — Nothing in particular. But at home he serves his brother and sister and parents with great care.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What is this! You have become a 'pumpkin-cutting elder uncle'. You are neither a man of the world nor a devotee of God[1]. This is not right. In some homes an old man is busy day and night only with the children of the family. Sitting in the parlour, he smokes his hubble-bubble and does no work – except that sometimes he goes inside the house and cuts a pumpkin for the family. The ladies of the family don't cut pumpkin; they send him word through the boys to come in and cut it for them. The old man cuts the pumpkin into two. It is the only work this man has to do. That's why he is called a 'pumpkin-cutting elder uncle'.

"Please do 'this' as well as 'that'. Attend to worldly duties, but keep your mind at the lotus feet of the Lord. And when you are alone, read

[1] Hari

devotional scriptures like *Srimad Bhagavata*, or *Chaitanya Charitamrita*."

It is almost ten at night. The Kali Temple has not yet been closed. M. walks through the courtyard, talking with Ram Chatterji. First he pays obeisance in the Radhakanta Temple and then in Mother Kali's shrine. The moon appears in the sky. It is the second day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravana. The courtyard and the temple spire look beautiful.

M. returns to Thakur's room where he sees him seated for dinner. He is facing south. His meal consists of some farina pudding and one or two *luchis*. After some time, M. and his friend salute Thakur and take their leave. They will return to Calcutta tonight.

Chapter II

Dialogue between Guru and disciple – secret talk

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller cot in his room talking alone with Mani. Mani is sitting on the floor. It is Friday, 7 September 1883, the sixth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Bhadra. It is about 7:30 in the evening.

Sri Ramakrishna — I went to Calcutta the other day. While going along in the carriage, I saw that everyone's attention was on lower things. They were all worried for their stomachs – they were running around to earn a living. They all had their minds on 'lust and greed'. Only one or two people had fixed their sight on higher things, had their minds turned toward God.

Mani — The present times add to our worry about the upkeep of the stomach. Imitating the English, people are drawn more and more to creature comforts. Thus their wants have increased.

Sri Ramakrishna — What do the English think about God?

Mani — They believe in the formless God.

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna sees no difference in the state of Brahmajnana[1] – he sees the same Consciousness pervading all: the English, Hindus, depressed classes, in animals, in insects, excreta, urine, and in all elements

Sri Ramakrishna — We, too, have the same belief.

Both of them are silent for awhile. Thakur now describes his state of Brahmajnana.

Sri Ramakrishna — One day I saw that it was all one Consciousness that pervades everything – without any distinction. At first I was shown several men and some animals and other creatures – among them were the educated rich, Englishmen, Muslims, myself, a *chandala*[2], a dog and a Muslim with a long beard holding a porcelain plate of rice in his hand. He put the rice from the plate into everybody's mouth. I tasted a little too.

"Another day I was shown excreta, urine, cereal and all kinds of foodstuff. Suddenly the soul emerged from within [my body] and tasted all of

[1] Knowledge of the Absolute
[2] A man who cremates; a scavenger

them – like the flame of a fire. It was just like a tongue licking each article one by one. It tasted everything, including the excreta and urine. I was thus shown that it is all one, without any difference."

His earlier story – vision of his intimate disciples – is Thakur an avatar?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — Another day the devotees who visit me here – my intimate disciples, my very own – were revealed to me. Thereafter, as soon as the conch shell and the bells of the evening worship sounded, I would climb to the roof of the Kuthi and cry aloud with yearning, 'I say, where are you people? Please, come here! I am dying to see you!'

"Well, what do you feel about all these visions of mine?"

Mani — God is playing His sport in your body. I have understood that you are the instrument and He the Being who uses the instrument. He has created every other creature as if with a machine, but He has created you with His own hands.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, Hazra says that one acquires the six divine powers after God-realization.

Mani — They who want pure love and devotion for God do not care for these powers.

Sri Ramakrishna — Perhaps Hazra was a poor man in his previous birth and that is why he is so very

keen to have riches. He asks me what I talk about with the cook. He says, 'By talking to the treasurer of the temple, I can get you whatever you want!' (Mani laughs loudly).

(Laughing) "That is how he talks about these things. I listen to him silently."

A devotee can easily comprehend that God incarnated as a man – powers and sweetness

Mani — You have said several times that the pure devotee does not want to see His grandeur. The pure devotee likes to see God as Gopala[1]. First, God becomes the magnet and the devotee the needle. In the end the devotee becomes the magnet and God the needle. In other words, God becomes small to the devotee.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is like the sun at dawn. One can look at it easily – it doesn't dazzle the eyes. Instead, the eyes are satisfied. God becomes tender for the sake of His devotees. He appears before them, leaving His powers behind.

Both of them are silent.

Mani — Why should your visions not be real? If they are not real, then the whole world is all the more unreal – for it is the same mind that is the instrument of perception. All these visions come to your pure mind, and our minds see worldly things.

[1] Baby Krishna

Sri Ramakrishna — Now I see you understand well that the world is ephemeral. Well, tell me, what do you think of Hazra?

Mani — Oh, he is a man of a particular type. (Thakur laughs.)

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, do you know anybody similar to me?

Mani — No, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Any paramahamsa[1] similar to me?

Mani — No, sir. You are incomparable.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Have you heard of the 'achina tree'?

Mani — No, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is a special kind of tree, but nobody can recognize it.

Mani — Sir, you cannot be recognized either. The more one understands you, the more he will progress.

> Mani is silent and says to himself, "Thakur has talked of the 'sun at dawn' and the 'achina tree'. Do these indicate an incarnation of God? Is it God's sport as a human being? Is Thakur himself an incarnation? Is that why he used to stand on the roof of the Kuthi and call out with yearning to his intimate disciples, 'I say, where are you all? Please come!' "

[1] Highest class of saints who have attained supreme knowledge and sanctity

Section VI

At the Dakshineswar Temple with Ratan and other Devotees

Sri Ramakrishna has but one thought and one word – that trick is the best trick

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller cot in his room at the Kali Temple. He is smiling and talking with the devotees. They have all eaten. It must be one or two o'clock.

It is Sunday, 9 September 1883, the 7th day of the bright fortnight in the month of Bhadra. Rakhal, M. and Ratan are sitting on the floor. Now and then Ramlal, Ram Chatterji and Hazra enter the room, sit for awhile and then leave. Ratan manages Jadu Mallick's garden estate. He is devoted to Thakur and occasionally visits him. Thakur is talking to him now. Ratan says, "A theatrical performance by Nilkantha will be staged at Jadu Mallick's Calcutta house."

Ratan — You must come and see it. He has sent you word that a theatrical performance will be staged.

Sri Ramakrishna — That is good. I want to go. Oh, how full of love and devotion Nilkantha's songs are!

A Devotee — Right, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — When he sings, he is bathed in tears. (To Ratan) I wonder if I might stay the night there.

Ratan — That would be very nice.

Ram Chatterji and the other devotees ask about the incident of a theft of sandals at Jadu Mallick's house.

Ratan — The golden sandals of the Deity were stolen from Jadu Mallick's house. There is a great uproar in the house. They will use a charmed plate to detect the thief. Everybody will sit and the plate will move in the direction of the thief.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — How does the plate move? Does it move by itself?

Ratan — No. A person presses it with his hand.

A Devotee — It is a kind of 'sleight of hand' – it's a trick.

Sri Ramakrishna — Only that cleverness by which God is realized is real cleverness – that trick is the best trick[1].

[1] Sā cāturī cāturī

Chapter II

Tantrik spiritual discipline and Sri Ramakrishna's filial attitude

The conversation goes on. In the meantime some Bengali gentlemen enter Thakur's room, salute him and sit down. One of them is already acquainted with Thakur. These gentlemen practice the Tantrik disciplines of five ingredients[1]. Thakur can tell what is in another's mind[2], he knows what attitude one holds. He has also heard that one of them performs a sinful act in the name of religion: he is having an illicit affair with the widow of the brother of a big man. In the name of religion he practices the disciplines of the five ingredients with her.

Sri Ramakrishna practices the filial attitude. He considers every woman his mother; he even sees the form of the Mother of the Universe in a prostitute.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Where is Achalananda? Kalikinkar came here the other day and also someone called Singhi. (To M. and others) Achalananda and his disciples have a different attitude from mine. I have the attitude of a child.

The visiting gentlemen remain silent.

His earlier story – Tantrik disciplines practiced by Achalananda

Sri Ramakrishna — I have the attitude of a child. Achalananda used to stay here at times. He would drink a lot of consecrated wine. Hearing that I had

[1] The use of meat, fish, wine, money and sexual intercourse
[2] *Antaryami*

the attitude of a child, he insisted, 'Why don't you practice heroic disciplines with a woman? Don't you believe in Shiva's school of thought? Shiva authored the Tantra – it includes spiritual disciplines in all the different attitudes. The disciplines of the attitude of a 'hero' is also prescribed.'

"I replied, 'I don't know, my dear sir. I don't like such things at all. I have the attitude of a child.' "

Duties of a father – Sri Ramakrishna denigrates occult powers and the five ingredients – the right use of money

"Achalananda didn't support his children. He used to say to me, 'God will look after the children, for such is His will.' I would remain silent. But I say, who will bring up the children? By giving up his wife and children, perhaps he has found a way to earn money. People might think that he has renounced everything. In this way a lot of money might come his way.

"To practice spiritual disciplines to win a lawsuit, or to earn a lot of money – or to help somebody win a lawsuit, or to procure property! These are matters of very low intelligence!

"Money should be utilized to buy food and a home to live in; in the service of deities, sadhus and devotees; and to help a poor man one may meet. This is making the right use of money. Money is not meant to be used for enjoying luxuries, or to provide bodily comforts, or to earn name and fame.

"People practice the disciplines of the five ingredients of the Tantrik school to attain occult powers. But it is an act of very low intelligence! Krishna said to Arjuna, 'Friend, even if you attain one of the eight occult powers, you will add to your power – but you will not attain Me by it.' Occult powers don't free you from maya. Maya begets egotism. What low intelligence! What use is it to take three glasses of wine from a contemptible place, or to win a lawsuit [with the use of occult powers]?"

What use is it to practice hatha yoga to increase the span of life?

"The body, money and so on are all ephemeral. Why worry so much about them? Look at the hatha yogis. Their only concern is how to add years to their lives. They don't aim at realizing God. They practice hatha yoga exercises like neti[1] and dhoti[2] – they merely take milk through a tube and clean their stomachs.

"There was a goldsmith whose tongue turned up and stuck to his palate. He looked like the picture of a man in *Jada* samadhi. He became motionless. He remained like this for many days. People began to visit and worship him. After a number of years his tongue suddenly relaxed and he regained normal consciousness. Then he even resumed his goldsmith profession. (All laugh.)

"All these things concern the body. They almost never relate one to the Lord. The brother of

[1] Cleaning of nose with water
[2] A method of cleaning entrails with water

Shalagram (a dealer in tabasheer[1]) knew eighty-two yoga postures. He would talk about his yoga samadhi, but in his mind he would secretly yearn for 'lust and gold'. He saw a bank note worth many thousands of rupees belonging to Diwan Madan Bhatt lying somewhere. Tempted by greed, he swallowed it in the hope that he could take it out later [by some yogic procedure]. That note was recovered from him – and he was jailed for three years. In my guilelessness I had thought that he had made a lot of spiritual progress! I swear it!"

His earlier story – Mahendra Pal is returned his money – Bhagavati, the oil woman – his contempt for the Kartabhaja sect's practicing sadhana with women as partners

"Mahendra Pal of Sinthi gave five rupees to Ramlal. When he left, Ramlal told me. I asked him why he had given the money. Ramlal replied, 'It is meant to be used here.' It occurred to me, 'We owe the milkman. Good, we can pay off some of what we owe.' My Divine Mother! I was lying on the bed that night and suddenly I got up. It felt like a cat was scratching inside my chest. I immediately went to Ramlal and asked him, 'For whom did he give the money? Is it for your aunt[2]?' Ramlal replied, 'No, it is meant for you.' Then I said to him. 'No, go and return the money immediately. If you don't, I will have no peace.'

"Rising early in the morning, Ramlal went and returned the money. Then I was at peace.

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[1] Hard substance extracted from bamboo joints and used medicinally; sugar of bamboo

[2] Referring to Holy Mother

"There was Bhagavati, the oil woman of the Kartabhaja sect, in the village (Kamarpukur). The men of the sect practice spiritual disciplines with women as their partners. The women cannot practice sadhana and bhajan without a man. This man is called 'Ragakrishna[1]'. The man asks thrice, 'Have you attained Krishna?' Each of the three times the woman says, 'Yes, I have.'

"Bhagavati belonged to the *shudra* caste [a low caste], she was an oil woman. Everybody would take the dust of her feet and salute her. This enraged the landlord. I once saw him. He sent a wicked man to her. Seduced by him, she gave birth to a boy.

"Once a big man came to me. He said, 'Sir, do something so that I may somehow win my lawsuit. I have come here because I have heard a lot about you.' I said, 'My dear sir, I am not that kind of person. You have made a mistake. You must go to Achalananda for this purpose.'

"He who has genuine love and devotion to God does not care for wealth, health and such things. He reflects that the austerities and repetition of God's name are not for creature comforts, for name and fame, or for wealth. All these are ephemeral – just a matter of two days."

The visiting gentlemen now rise, salute, and say, "May we leave?" They depart. Sri Ramakrishna smiles a little and says to M., "A thief never listens to religion." (All laugh.)

[1] Ideal of love

Chapter III

Faith in oneself has its basis in one's belief in God

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, says to Mani) — Well, what do you think of Narendra?

Mani — Sir, he is fine.

Sri Ramakrishna — You see, his understanding matches his learning. And then he is good at singing and playing musical instruments. Besides that, he has perfect control over his senses. He says that he will not marry.

Mani — You said that he who thinks too much of sin becomes a sinner and can't lift himself up. That I am the son of God – with this faith one makes quick progress in spiritual life.

His earlier story – faith of Krishnakishore – faith of Haladhari's father

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, faith indeed!

"What faith Krishnakishore has! He used to say, 'I have taken His name once, how can sin touch me? I have become pure and sinless.' Haladhari said, 'Ajamila went out to practice austerities to attain Narayana[1]. Can one obtain His grace without austerity? What use is it just to say "Narayana" once?' How angry Krishnakishore was to hear him say that! Krishnakishore had come to

[1] A name of Vishnu

the garden to pick flowers. He didn't even look at Haladhari's face.

"Haladhari's father was a great devotee. Taking his bath in waist deep water, he would recite a mantra 'red-hued and four-faced' and meditate on it. Then he would shed tears of ecstatic love[1].

"Once a sadhu came to the Ariadaha bathing ghat. We talked of going to see him. Haladhari said, 'What use is it to see the cage made of the five gross elements?' Later, when Krishnakishore heard this, he said, 'What did he say? That it would be of no use to see a sadhu? He who repeats the name of Krishna, or he who repeats the name of Rama, develops a body made of Spirit. He sees everything permeated with divine consciousness. Krishna is the embodiment of Spirit and so is His Abode.' He said, 'If you take the name of Krishna or of Rama only once, you gain the fruit of a hundred evening services.' While dying, one of his sons uttered the name of Rama. Krishnakishore said, 'He uttered the name of Rama, so he has nothing to worry about.' But sometimes he wept in grief for the loss of his son.

"When Krishnakishore felt thirsty in Vrindavan, he said to a cobbler, 'Say the name of Shiva.' Uttering 'Shiva,' he drew water for Krishnakishore. Such an orthodox brahmin and he took that water. What faith!

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[1] Prema

"One may perform worship, repetition of the Name, sandhya[1] and other ritual practices, but they yield nothing unless one has faith in God. What do you say?"

Mani — True, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — I have seen people coming to the Ganges ghat to take a bath and talking about nothing but worldly matters. A widowed aunt says, 'Mother, they can't celebrate Durga Puja without me. I even have to mould the image. I have to organize everything whenever there is a marriage in the family. Only then is it conducted properly. I have to arrange the flowerbed for the bride and the groom, and even supervise the catechu garden.'

Mani — How can we blame them for it? How else will they pass the time?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) —People have a shrine on the roof of the house where they worship Narayana. Women prepare flower offerings and grind sandal paste in the shrine, but they don't talk a word about God. They talk about such things as what is to be cooked today, whether they could get the right stuff in the market, such-and-such a dish was tasty yesterday, that boy is a cousin, what job one has, and 'Don't ask how I am doing. My Hari is not here.'

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[1] Worship and meditation performed at dawn, noon, and sunset by orthodox Hindus

"Imagine, they talk of all these worldly things in the shrine even at the time of worship!"

Mani — Sir, generally speaking, that is so. As you say, he who has love for God doesn't have to perform worship and sandhya[1] for long.

Chapter IV

What is God's Spirit Form? After Brahmajnana comes vijnana – God alone is the substance

Thakur is talking alone with Mani.

Mani — Sir, if it is God Himself who has become everything, then why are there so many different feelings?

Sri Ramakrishna — He dwells in all beings as the All-pervasive Being[2]. But there is a special manifestation of His power in some. In some, there is more power of knowledge[3]; in others, more power of ignorance[4]. Moreover, some have more of His Power than others. Haven't you noticed that there are gamblers and swindlers? And there are also people as ferocious as tigers. I say that the swindler is Narayana, and so is the tiger.

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[1] Worship and meditation performed at dawn, noon, and sunset by orthodox Hindus
[2] *Vibhu*
[3] *Vidya Shakti*
[4] *Avidya Shakti*

Mani (smiling) — Yes, sir. We must salute them from a distance. If you were to come near the tiger Narayana and embrace it, it would devour you.

Sri Ramakrishna — God and His Power – nothing else exists except Brahman and His Power. While singing a hymn of praise to Ramachandra, Narada said, 'Oh Rama, you yourself are Shiva and Sita is Bhagavati; You are Brahma and Sita is Brahmani; you are Indra and Sita is Indrani. You are Narayana [Vishnu] and Sita is Lakshmi. You are the symbol of all that is masculine, and Sita of all that is feminine.'

Mani — And what is God's Spirit form like?

> Sri Ramakrishna reflects for awhile and then says in a whisper, "Do you know what it's like? It's like water. You can know it only if you practice spiritual disciplines."

"You must believe in God's form. When you attain the knowledge of the Absolute[1], you realize that there is nothing separate – Brahman and His Power are one, like fire and its power to burn. The moment you think of fire, its burning power comes to mind. And the moment you think of the burning power, you think of the fire. It is like milk and its whiteness, water and its wetness.

"But there is something beyond knowledge of the Absolute. After jnana, comes vijnana. He who is aware of knowledge is also aware of ignorance. Vaishishtha was smitten with grief at the death of

[1] Brahmajnana

his hundred sons. When Lakshmana asked Rama about it, Rama said, 'Brother, go beyond knowledge and ignorance.' He who has knowledge also has ignorance. If a thorn pricks your foot, you have to use another thorn to take out the first. Having done that, you throw both thorns away."

Mani — Should one throw away both knowledge and ignorance?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, that is why vijnana is necessary.

"Just see, he who is aware of light is also aware of darkness. He who knows happiness also knows sorrow. He who is aware of virtue is also aware of vice. He who knows good also knows bad. He who knows what purity is, also knows impurity. He who is conscious of 'I' is also conscious of 'you'.

"Vijnana means knowing God in a special way. The awareness, the belief, that there is fire in wood is knowledge. To cook rice on the fire, eat it and be strong is called vijnana. To have the inner experience of the real nature of Atman[1] is knowledge. To talk with Him, to enjoy yourself with Him – in the attitude of a son, a friend, a servant, or a lover – this is vijnana. Being able to see that God has become the universe and its creatures is known as vijnana.

"According to one school of thought, God cannot be seen. Is God outside you, that you can see Him? One can only see oneself. When a ship enters

[1] Bodhebodha

the 'black waters', it does not return. It does not come back to report what it experienced."

Mani — As you say, when one climbs to the top of the monument, one loses sight of everything below: carriage and horse, men and women, houses, rooms, doors, shops, offices and the rest.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, these days I don't visit the Kali Temple. Am I committing an offence? Narendra used to say, 'He still visits the Kali Temple!'

Mani — Sir, you have new and different states of mind every day. How can you commit an offence?

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, someone told Sen about Hriday: 'Hriday is very ill. Please bring two pieces of dhoti and two long shirts for him. We shall send them to his village (Seor).' Sen brought just two rupees. Now tell me what that means. He has so much money and he only brought this sum. Do say something.

Mani — Sir, those who seek to realize God, who aim at attaining knowledge, cannot act in this [miserly] way.

Sri Ramakrishna — God alone is the Substance; all else is meaningless.

Section VII

Sri Ramakrishna is Invited to Calcutta

Chapter I

Thakur's auspicious visit to the house of Ishan Mukherji

The sweet sound of the morning arati is heard in the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. The waving of lights is accompanied by a morning symphony of sanai and other musical instruments[1]. Thakur stands up and repeats God's name in his sweet voice. He salutes the pictures of the gods and goddesses in the room one by one. Then he goes to the circular verandah to the west of his room to have darshan[2] of the holy Ganges and offers his obeisance to it. Some devotees are staying with him. Finishing their morning ablutions, they enter one by one to salute Sri Ramakrishna.

Rakhal is living with Thakur these days. Baburam arrived the previous evening. Mani has been staying with Thakur for the last fourteen days.

It is Thursday, 27 December 1883, the 13th lunar day of the dark fortnight of the month of Agrahayana. Having completed his bath very early in the morning, Thakur is preparing to go to Calcutta.

He calls out to Mani, "I have been invited to Ishan's house today. Baburam will come with me. You come too."

Mani prepares to go with him.

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[1] *Roshan chowki*

[2] Seeing, experiencing; paying respect to a holy place or person by a ceremonial visit; also the blessing or purification felt in the presence of holiness

It is winter. The carriage in which Thakur will travel stops near the nahabat at 8:00 o'clock. All the trees are flowering and the Ganges flows by in front. Joy seems to emanate from all directions. Sri Ramakrishna stands close to the pictures of the deities in his room and salutes them. Repeating the name of the Mother, he gets into the carriage for the journey. With him are Baburam and Mani. They have brought a warm cloth to cover Thakur's body, a warm cap to cover his head and ears, and a little bag of spices. Being winter, they will dress Thakur in warm clothes for the evening.

Thakur is smiling. He enjoys himself throughout the trip. At 9:00 o'clock the carriage enters Calcutta and reaches the road crossing the Machhua Bazaar that passes through Shyambazar. Mani knows the location of Ishan's house. Taking a turn at the street crossing, he asks the coachman to stop when they reach Ishan's house.

Ishan and his relatives come out to joyfully welcome Thakur. He is taken to the lower parlour where he sits down with the devotees.

After polite enquiries, Thakur talks to Shrish, Ishan's son. Shrish, having passed his M.A., L.L.B. examinations, is working as an attorney in Alipur. He secured first position at the University as a result of his Entrance and F.A. examinations – he scored at the top of all the candidates. He is now about thirty years old. His humility matches his scholarship: outwardly he seems to know nothing. He folds his hands to salute Thakur. Mani introduces Shrish to him, saying that a man of such calm disposition is hard to find.

Panacea for the bonds of action[1] and sinful actions – Karma Yoga

Sri Ramakrishna (to Shrish) — What are you doing these days?

Shrish — Sir, I practice law in Alipur.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — For such a man to be a lawyer! (To Shrish) Do you have any question to ask?

"How does one live in the world without attachment?"

Shrish — Sir, one has to do so many unrighteous acts working in the world. Some actions are evil, others are righteous. Are they the result of our past actions that we are impelled to perform them?

Sri Ramakrishna — How long must one perform actions? As long as one does not realize God. One gains everything when one has attained Him. Then one goes beyond virtue and vice.

"When the fruit appears, the flower drops off. It is for making the fruit that the flower appears.

"How long must one perform sandhya and other rituals? As long as the hair on the body does not stand on end and the eyes do not fill with tears while repeating the name of God. Both these states are the signs of God-realization; they indicate pure love and devotion.

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[1] Karma

"Having realized God, one goes beyond virtue and vice."

> Says Prasad: I bow my head before both desire and enjoyment,
>
> And having solved the mystery that Kali is the same as the Absolute, I have given up righteousness and unrighteousness.

"The nearer you approach God, the more He lessens your work. When the daughter-in-law in a household conceives, her mother-in-law gradually decreases her work. As soon as she reaches the ninth month of pregnancy, she ceases to work. When the baby is born, she only busies herself playing with it and enjoying herself with it."

Shrish — It is very difficult to proceed toward God while living a householder's life.

Instructions to a householder – yoga of practice[1] and spiritual discipline in a solitary place

Sri Ramakrishna — Why, what about the yoga of practice? In the countryside [Kamarpukur], the women of carpenter families sell flattened rice. Let me tell you how alert they are when they attend to their work. The pestle of the husking-machine falls constantly into the mortar. With one hand, the woman pushes paddy into the mortar and with the other, suckles a baby in her lap. In the meantime, a customer arrives and she attends to the sale while the pestle goes on pounding the paddy in the mortar. She says to the customer, 'Look, you owe

[1] *Abhyasa Yoga*

me so much money. Pay me and you can take your stuff.'

"Just see, she attends to all these things at the same time: suckling the child, pushing the paddy into the mortar while the pestle is pounding it, separating flattened rice from the powdered husk and taking it out of the mortar – and then talking to the buyer. This is what is known as the yoga of practice. Fifteen annas[1] of her mind are tied to the falling pestle of the husking-machine lest it should pound her hand. With one anna of her mind she suckles the baby and attends to the buyer. Similarly, those who lead a family life, a householder's life, must give fifteen annas of the mind to God. Otherwise, they will face complete ruination and fall into the hands of Death. One must attend to worldly duties with one anna of the mind.

"One can lead a family life after attaining knowledge. But one must first attain it. If you keep the milk of your mind in the water of the world, it will get mixed with water. You must first turn the milk of your mind into curd by placing it in a solitary nook and churn it to take out the butter. Then you can put it in the water of the world.

"It is enough if that much is done. Spiritual practice is needed. It is essential that an aspirant live in solitude in the initial stages of practice. When an Ashwattha tree is only a plant, it must be fenced, otherwise a goat or a cow may eat it. But when it grows a thick trunk, the fence can be

[1] Sixteen annas make one Rupee, one complement

removed. Then even if an elephant is tied to it, no harm can be done to the tree.

"So in the early stage of spiritual life, one must go away and live in solitude from time to time. Spiritual discipline is needed. One wants to eat rice. Is it possible to get cooked rice by just saying there is fire in the wood and rice is cooked over this fire? Fire is produced when one rubs one piece of wood against another.

"One becomes intoxicated and feels joy when one eats hemp. Does one become intoxicated and feel joy, if one doesn't eat it, if one does nothing but mutter, 'Hemp, hemp'?"

God-realization is the aim of life – worldly and spiritual knowledge – drinking milk

"However much one may have studied books, it is all futile unless one has love and devotion[1] for God, unless one has the desire to realize Him. A mere pundit without discrimination[2] and non-attachment[3] has his attention fixed on 'lust and greed'. A vulture soars high in the sky but its eyes remain fixed on the charnel pits where carcasses of animals are burnt.

"The knowledge which leads one to the realization of God is real knowledge. All else is futile.

"Well, what is your idea of God?"

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[1] Bhakti
[2] Viveka
[3] Vairagya

Shrish — I have only understood this much – that there is an All-knowing Person, by seeing whose creation one can know how much wisdom He has. Just take this illustration – what skill God shows to save the lives of fish and other aquatic creatures in a cold country! The colder it is, the more the water contracts. But how wonderful! A little before it turns into ice, the water becomes lighter and expands. Thus fish can survive in the coldest of seasons in the water of a lake. The whole of the upper layer turns into ice, but underneath the water remains liquid. If a very cold wind blows, it only affects the upper surface of ice. The water below it remains warm.

Sri Ramakrishna — That God exists may be known by looking at the universe. But it is one thing to hear about Him, another to see Him, and yet another to talk to Him. Some have heard of milk, others have seen it, and yet others have drunk it. One is happy to see milk, one becomes strong and nourished by drinking it. One attains peace only when one sees God; one feels bliss and becomes strengthened only by talking to Him.

Desire for salvation and yearning for God depends on the right time

Shrish — I don't get time to call on God.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — It is true that unless the time is ripe, nothing comes to pass. A boy said to his mother before going to sleep, 'Mother, please wake me up when I feel the call of nature.' The

mother said, 'Son, its pressure will wake you up. I don't have to wake you.'

"God has already decided what each one shall receive. A mother-in-law used to give a certain amount of rice to her daughters-in-law, measuring it with an earthen cup. The girls did not get enough rice. One day, to the great joy of the girls, the cup broke. The mother-in-law then said, 'You may dance and shout, my children, but I can measure the amount very well with the palm of my hand.' "

Give your power of attorney to the Lord

(To Shrish) "What else can you do? Surrender everything at His feet and give Him the general power of attorney. Let Him do what He considers best for you. If you place your responsibility on a great man, he will never do you any harm.

"Of course, spiritual practice is needed. But there are two kinds of spiritual aspirants. One has the nature of a young monkey, and the other the nature of a kitten. A young monkey somehow manages to cling to its mother. Likewise, some aspirants think that in order to attain God, they have to repeat the Name so many times, meditate for a certain period, and perform a certain amount of penance. This kind of aspirant tries to hold God by his own effort.

"On the other hand, the kitten itself cannot hold onto its mother. All it does is lie where it is and mew to call its mother – let the mother do what she likes. The mother cat sometimes puts it on a bed – or she may put it next to a woodpile. The mother will put it in her mouth and place it

anywhere she likes. The kitten doesn't know how to hold its mother. Likewise, there are some aspirants who do not calculate how much spiritual practice they do: how many times to repeat the Name, how long to meditate, and so on. They only weep and call upon Him with great yearning. Hearing their cries, God cannot stay away, but appears before them to grant His vision."

Chapter II

It is already late. The master of the house is preparing food for Thakur, so he is very busy. He goes inside the house to look after the meal preparation and to make other arrangements.

It is time to eat, so Thakur is a bit concerned. He walks up and down the room. But he still wears a smile on his face. Now and then he talks to Keshab, the musician.

God is the Doer – yet man is responsible for his own actions

Keshab, the musician — So God is both the 'instrument' and the 'cause'. Duryodhana said, 'Oh Krishna[1]! I act as You, seated within my heart, make me act.'

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Yes, it is He who makes us do everything. He indeed is the Doer; man is only an instrument.

"But this, too, is true: one has to reap the fruit of one's actions. Eat red chilies and you will feel a

[1] He called him Hrishikesh

burning in your stomach. It is God who has ordained that eating red chilies should give the burning sensation. If you do an evil deed, you will bear the result.

"But he who has attained God, who has gained the Lord's vision, can commit no sin. An expert musician cannot sing a false note. An expert musician sings only the correct notes of the octave: do, re, mi, fa."

The meal is ready to be served. Thakur goes inside the house, accompanied by the devotees, and takes his seat. Several varieties of dishes and many delicious sweets have been prepared in the house of this brahmin devotee**.**

It is about three o'clock. After eating, Sri Ramakrishna comes back to Ishan's parlour and sits down. Shrish and M. sit close to him. Thakur resumes his conversation with Shrish.

Sri Ramakrishna — What is your attitude? Is it the attitude of Soham, or of the Master and the servant?

Is jnana yoga or bhakti yoga for the householder?

"The attitude of the Master and servant is very good for householders. One must act. How can one have the attitude 'I am He' in that state? He who says, 'I am He' considers the world a dream, his body and mind also a dream, even his I-ness a dream. That is why, with this attitude, he is unable to perform worldly duties. For him the attitude of a servant of the Lord is very good.

"Hanuman had the attitude of a servant. Hanuman said to Rama, 'Rama, sometimes I consider You to be the Whole[1] and myself a portion of That, that You are the Master and I am Your servant. But when I attain the knowledge of the Highest Truth[2], I realize that You are none other than I, and I none other than You.'

"When you have attained the highest Knowledge, you may have the attitude of Soham – but it is an attitude far removed from the ordinary man's experience."

Shrish — True, sir. With the feeling of being the servant of God, a man is free from all anxieties and worries. He is fully dependent on the Lord. A dog is very devoted to its master, so it lives in peace by surrendering itself completely to him.

God is with form as well as without form – great importance of Name

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, which do you like – God with form or the formless God? Do you know the truth? He who is formless also takes a form. To a devotee, He appears as a form. It is like a boundless expanse of water, a mighty ocean, without any shore or bank. Some of the water is frozen into ice at some places – the water turns into ice due to extreme cold. Similarly, a devotee has the vision of God with form with the cooling influence of his love and devotion for Him. And when the sun rises, the ice melts and becomes the same water as before.

[1] Purna; perfect
[2] Tattva jnana

Similarly, when a devotee treads the path of Self-knowledge[1], or the path of discrimination, he does not see the aspect of God with form any longer. Then all is formless. When the sun of Self-knowledge rises, the ice of God's form melts away.

"But see, the Being who is formless has Himself taken up a form."

It is dusk. Thakur rises to return to Dakshineswar. He stands and talks to Ishan on an open porch south of the parlour. Someone remarks that repeating God's Name does not always seem to bear fruit.

Ishan says, "What do you mean? Though the seed of the Ashwattha tree is tiny, it contains within it a very big tree. It is only that the tree is not visible for a long time."

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, yes. It takes a long time to see the effect.

Ishan is an unattached householder – state of a paramahamsa

Ishan's house is located east of the house of his father-in-law, Kshetranath Chatterji. There is a path connecting the houses. Thakur stands at the gate of the Chatterji house. Ishan comes with his family to see him off by carriage.

Thakur says to Ishan, "You are living in the household like a mud fish. It lives in the mud of a pond, but the mud doesn't stain its body."

"There are both knowledge[2] and ignorance[3] in this world of maya. Whom do I call a

[1] Jnana
[2] Vidya
[3] Avidya

paramahamsa? He who, like a swan, can take the milk from a mixture of water and milk by separating the water from the milk; he who, like an ant, can take the sugar from a mixture of sugar and sand, leaving aside the sand."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and the harmony of religions – sin does not affect an *Ishvarakoti*[1]

It is twilight. Thakur has arrived at the house of his devotee, Ramchandra Dutta. After visiting him, he will go back to Dakshineswar.

A lamp is lit in the parlour where Thakur is sitting with his devotees. He is talking with Mahendra Goswami. Goswami lives in the same neighborhood. Thakur is fond of him. When he visits Ram, the Goswami usually comes to see him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Both Vaishnavas[2] and Shaktas[3] have the same goal. It is only their paths that are different. True Vaishnavas do not run down Shakti.

Goswami (laughing) — Hara [Shiva] and Parvati are our Father and Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Thank you[4]. Yes, Father and Mother!

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[1] Eternally free and perfect souls, born on earth for the good of mankind, with at least some of the characteristics of an avatar
[2] Worshippers of Vishnu
[3] Worshippers of Shakti
[4] Sri Ramakrishna said 'Thank You' in English

Goswami — Besides, to criticize anybody, especially for a Vaishnava, is a sin – it is a Vaishnava transgression. All sins can be forgiven – but not this transgression.

Sri Ramakrishna — Not everybody is touched by sin. The *Ishvarakoti* is not affected by sin. For example, an incarnation of God like Chaitanyadeva.

"If a boy holds his father's hand while he walks on the balk of a field, he can fall into the ditch. But if the father holds the boy's hand, he can never fall.

"Listen, I asked the Mother for pure love and devotion[1]. I said to the Mother, 'Here is Your righteousness[2], here is Your unrighteousness[3]. Take them and grant me pure love and devotion. Here is Your purity and also Your impurity, only grant me pure love. Mother, here is Your vice and here is your virtue, only grant me pure love and devotion.' "

Goswami — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — You should pay respect to all religions. But there is something called single-minded devotion[4]. You may salute everybody, but when you love someone with your heart and soul, it is known as single-minded devotion.

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[1] Bhakti
[2] Dharma
[3] Adharma
[4] *Nishtha bhakti*

"Hanuman liked no other form than that of Rama.

"The milkmaids[1] had such single-minded devotion that they didn't want to see Krishna of Dwaraka with a turban on his head.

"A wife renders service to her husband's younger and elder brothers, like washing their feet and setting places for them to eat. But the way she serves her husband, she serves nobody else. She has a special relationship with her husband."

Ram treats Thakur with sweets and other refreshments.

Thakur is ready to start for Dakshineswar. He takes the shawl and cap from M. The cap covering his ears is made of baize. Thakur gets into the carriage with the devotees. Ram and other devotees help him sit down. M. also climbs into the carriage to return to Dakshineswar.

[1] Gopis

Section VIII

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra and other devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the smaller cot in his aforesaid room by the Kali Temple. He is listening to devotional songs being sung by Trailokya Sanyal of the Brahmo Samaj.

It is Sunday, 2 March, 1884, 20th Falgun, the fifth day of the bright fortnight, 1290 B.Y. Devotees, including Narendra, Surendra (Mitra) and others, are sitting on the floor listening to the songs.

Narendra's father was an advocate of the High Court. After his passing away, the family has fallen into such dire straights that they sometimes have nothing to eat. Because of these difficult circumstances, Narendra is greatly troubled.

Thakur has not recovered fully from his broken arm. It has been in a splint for many days.

Trailokya is singing a hymn about the Divine Mother. He is saying through the song, "O Mother, take me on your lap and hold me to Your bosom, covering me with the end of your sari."

Let me lie covered in Your lap, O Divine Mother.

May I see your face and cry, "Mother, Mother."

Immersed in the sweetness of Bliss and Consciousness[1], overwhelmed by the sleep of the Great Communion,

May I gaze on You with unblinking eyes and retain Your form in my mind's eye.

I am frightened by the sight and sounds (of this world) and cry bitterly because of this fright.

Hold me to Your bosom, having covered me with the end of Your cloth, O Divine Mother.

As Thakur listens to the song, he sheds tears of divine love and exclaims, "Ah! What feeling!"

Trailokya sings again –

O Hari, You are the destroyer of my shame.

(Please fulfill my wish.)

Who but You can save the honour of Your devotee, O Lord[2]?

You are the Master of my soul, the support of my life. I am Your slave forever.

Bigger measure of kirtan

I have made Your feet my haven. Giving up all ideas of caste and ancestry, I have given up all fear and shame.

Tell me, O Lord, where can this wayfarer go?

Now I have lost reputation for Your sake. How people in the world find frivolous fault with me!

Because I love You, I am reprimanded at home.

All my shame and mistakes are now Yours. Take them or leave them, they are Your responsibility.

O Lord Hari! The honour of Your slave is Your honour.

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[1] Chidananda
[2] Bhagavan

O Lord of my heart, I derive all honour from You. Do as You will, O Lord.

Smaller measure of kirtan

Taking me from home, enchant me with Your love, O Lord Hari! Give me shelter at Your feet.

Feed me with the honey of Your divine love day after day. O friend of my soul, redeem your Premdas.

Sri Ramakrishna again sheds tears of divine love and then sits on the floor. He begins to sing a song of Ramprasad.

All fame and dishonour, all sweetness and bitterness, belong to You, O Divine Mother!

Why do You ruin my joy and sweetness, O Goddess of all joy and bliss?

Thakur says to Trailokya, "Ah, how sweet your songs are! Your songs are authentic. Only he who goes to the sea can bring sea water and show it to others."

Trailokya sings again –

O Lord, You sing and You dance and You Yourself keep the beat.

Man is only a witness to it; foolishly does he think, 'Me and mine.'

The life of man is only the shadow of a puppeteer's marionette. Only if he walks Your path can he become a god.

You are the driver of the machine of this body. You are the charioteer of the chariot of the Atman. A human being makes mistakes, thinking he has free will.

You are the Lord of the heart, the Soul of the soul, and the Mainstay of all. You can transform an unholy person into a saint by the Power of your holiness.

The Absolute is identical with the phenomenal world – perfect knowledge[1], or vijnana

When the song ends, Thakur speaks.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya and others) — It is Lord Hari who is the Master, and He Himself is the servant – this is the attitude of a man of perfect knowledge. First following the path of 'not this, not this,' one realizes that the Lord is the only Reality and all else is illusory. Then one sees that it is the Lord Himself who has become everything – that the Lord Himself has become maya: living beings and the universe. The *Puranas* say that evolution is followed by involution. For example, take the bel-fruit. It has a shell, seeds and kernel. Throw away the shell and seeds and you have the kernel. But if you want to know the weight of the bel-fruit, it will not do to throw away the shell and the seeds. That is why, after negating the universe and its living beings to reach Sat-chit-ananda, one sees that He Himself has become the entire universe and its living beings. The kernel belongs to the bel-fruit, just as the seeds and shell do. Butter is a part of milk, just as buttermilk is; they belong to the same substance.

"Even so, one may ask how Sat-chit-ananda has become so hard – touch the earth and you find it hard. The answer is that blood and semen are fluids, but they produce such a big creature as man. It is possible for God to do anything.

[1] Purna jnana

"One must first reach the Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda and then, coming down, observe these things."

World does not exist without God – distinction between a yogi and a devotee

"It is God alone who has become everything. The world does not exist apart from God. Having studied the *Vedas* from his guru, Ramachandra felt a spirit of dispassion[1]. He said, 'If the world is like a dream, one might as well renounce it.' Dasharatha [his father] became frightened at this. He sent guru Vaishishtha to dissuade Rama. Vaishishtha said, 'Rama, why do you talk of giving up the world? Please tell me, does the world exist apart from God? If you can convince me that the world is not born of God, you may renounce it.' Rama was silenced; he could give no reply.

"All elements are finally dissolved into the ether[2]. At the time of creation, ether evolves into *mahat*[3], and from *mahat* emerges the ego. The world is created in this order. It is the process of involution and evolution. The devotee accepts everything. He accepts not only the Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda, but also the phenomenal world and its creatures.

"The yogi, however, treads another path. He reaches the Supreme Atman[4] but does not return. He becomes united with the Supreme Atman.

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[1] Vairagya
[2] *Akasa*; the subtlest of the five elements
[3] Cosmic Intelligence
[4] Paramatman

"He who sees the Lord in one limited area only is a man of 'partial wisdom'. He believes that God does not exist beyond that particular thing.

"There are three classes of devotees. The inferior class of devotee says, 'God is out there' – in other words, he points to heaven. The mediocre devotee says, God resides within the heart as its Inner Controller[1]. And the highest class of devotee says, 'God has become everything. Indeed, all I see are His various forms.' Narendra used to make fun of this, saying, 'He indeed has become all – so He is the pot and the pan.' " (All laugh.)

Doubts vanish after God-vision – leads to renunciation of work – omnipresent[2] Shiva

"All doubts vanish when one sees God. It is one thing to hear about God and quite another thing to have His vision. Through hearing alone, one cannot have one hundred percent faith. However, by having a direct vision of God, one is wholly convinced.

"After God-realization one gives up formal worship. I have given up that kind of worship. I used to worship in the Kali Temple. It was suddenly revealed to me that everything is made of pure Spirit – the *koshakushi*[3], the altar and the door-frame – everything made of Spirit; men, birds and beasts all made of Spirit. So I began to shower

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[1] *Antaryami*

[2] *Virat*; the all-pervading Spirit in the form of the universe

[3] A kosha is a small water container, a kushi is a small spoon for removing water from it. Both are usually made of copper and are used in ritualistic worship.

flowers all around like a crazy man. I began to worship anything and everything I saw.

"One day when I was offering bel-leaves on the head of Shiva, it was revealed to me that the vast universe itself, *Virat*, is Shiva. Then I stopped worshipping the image of Shiva. And when I was picking flowers, it was suddenly revealed to me that every flowering plant is like a bouquet."

Distinction between joy of poetry and God-realization – 'no poetry, O Lord of the Universe'

Trailokya — Oh, how beautiful God's creation is!

Sri Ramakrishna — Oh no, it was revealed to me in a flash, not through calculation. It was shown to me that every flowering plant is a bouquet decorating the Universal Form of God[1]. I stopped picking flowers from that day. I see men in the same way. God indeed moves around in the form of a human body. I see it like a pillow floating on a wave, rising and falling to and fro. Lifted by the wave, it rises; and it descends again with the tide.

Why did Thakur take up a human body? Thakur's desire

"The body is momentary; God is the only Reality. The body now is and the next moment it is not. Many years ago, when I was suffering terribly from dysentery, Hriday said, 'Do ask the Divine Mother to cure you.' I felt ashamed to ask Her to cure my illness. Instead I said, 'Mother, I saw a human

[1] *Virat*

skeleton in the Asiatic Society. Oh Mother, it was given a human shape by joining the bones with wires. Pray fortify my body a little so that I can sing Your glories and repeat Your Name.'

"Why this desire to live? After killing Ravana, Rama and Lakshmana entered Lanka. When they entered Ravana's palace, they saw Ravana's mother, Nikasha, running away. Lakshmana was surprised and asked Rama, 'Rama, Nikasha's whole clan has perished, but she still has so much attraction for life.' Calling her to him, Rama said, 'Do not be afraid! Why were you running away?' Nikasha said, 'Rama, I was not fleeing out of fear. I have been able to see so much of your divine sport because my life was spared. If I live still longer, how much more of it I will witness! That is why I desire to live.'

"If one has no desires, the body does not last.

(Smiling) "I had one or two desires. I said, 'Mother, grant me the company of those who have renounced 'lust and greed'.' I also said, 'I would like to keep the company of Your jnanis and devotees. So grant me a little strength that I may be able to move around a little and visit people here and there.' But She did not grant me the strength to move about."

Trailokya (smiling) — Have your desires been fulfilled?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — A few remain. (All laugh.)

'The body is indeed ephemeral. When I broke my arm, I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother it gives me so much pain!' A carriage and its driver were then revealed to me. One or two screws of the carriage had fallen out. The carriage moved as the driver moved it. The carriage had no power of its own.

"Then why do I try to take care of my body? So that I may enjoy myself with God. So that I may repeat His name and sing His glories. So that I may move about here and there to associate with His devotees and jnanis."

Chapter II

In the company of Narendra and others – Narendra in happiness and sorrow – happiness and misery related to the body

Narendra is sitting on the floor in front of Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya and the devotees) — The body is indeed subject to happiness and sorrow. Take the case of Narendra – his father has died and, as a result, his family is in a dire state. Nothing seems able to solve his problems. Sometimes God keeps one in happiness, at other times in misery.

Trailokya — Sir, the Lord will be merciful to him (Narendra).

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — When? No one remains hungry in Annapurna's home at Kashi, yet some have to wait for food until evening.

"Hriday asked Sambhu Mallick for some money. Sambhu Mallick held the views of the English. He said, 'Why should I give you money? You can earn your livelihood by working. Anyway, you are earning something. But if somebody is extremely poor, it is a different matter. The purpose of charity is fulfilled when one gives to the blind, the lame, or the handicapped.' Then Hriday said, 'Sir, then I don't want your money. I pray to the Lord that I do not become blind, handicapped or extremely poor. I don't want you to have to give, nor do I wish to receive.' "

Narendra and atheism – the Lord's way of work and Bhishma Deva

Thakur speaks as if piqued that the Lord has not yet shown mercy to Narendra. He looks affectionately at Narendra every now and then.

Narendra — I am studying atheism.

Sri Ramakrishna — There are both theism and atheism. Why not study the former?

Surendra — The Lord is just. He will certainly look after His devotee.

Sri Ramakrishna — The scriptures say that one who has given in charity in a previous life gains wealth in this life. Even so, do you know how it is? This world is God's maya. And there is a lot of

confusion in the domain of maya. It is all incomprehensible.

"The ways of the Lord are inscrutable. Bhishma Deva was lying on a bed of arrows. The Pandavas, accompanied by Krishna, went to see him. After awhile Bhishma began to weep. The Pandavas said to Krishna, 'Krishna, how amazing! Grandfather Bhishma[1] is one of the eight *Vasus*[2]. There is no man of spiritual wisdom like him. Yet he weeps during his last moments.' Krishna replied, 'Bhishma is not weeping because of that. Ask him why he weeps.' When asked, Bhishma replied, 'Krishna, I have not been able to understand the ways of God at all. I am weeping because I see that Narayana Himself is a constant companion of the Pandavas – still there is no end to their trials and tribulations. When I reflect on this, I realize that it is impossible to understand anything of God's ways.' "

Pure Atman is immutable like Mount Sumeru

"God revealed to me that the Paramatman, which is described as the pure Atman in the *Vedas*, is immutable, like Mount Sumeru, unattached and beyond happiness and sorrow. There is great confusion about the working of His maya. No one can say what event will come after this, or if this will produce that."

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[1] *Pitamah*
[2] A compact group of eight *devas* (gods)

Surendra (smiling) — If one gives away in charity in a previous life and gets wealth in the next, then we should give in charity now.

Sri Ramakrishna — He who has money should give in charity. (To Trailokya) Jaygopal Sen is a wealthy man, so he should give in charity. It is contemptible that he doesn't do so. Some people are miserly even when they are rich. Nobody is sure who will enjoy his riches after he dies.

"Jaygopal came here the other day. He comes by carriage. The carriage carried a broken lantern and was driven by a horse that looked like it had come straight from the charnel house. The coachman looked as if he had just been discharged from the Medical College Hospital. And he brought two rotten pomegranates!" (All laugh.)

Surendra — Jaygopal Babu belongs to the Brahmo Samaj. It seems that Keshab's Brahmo Samaj has no worthwhile men now. Vijay Goswami, Shivanath and some others have founded the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Govinda Adhikari would not keep good actors in his theatre for the *yatras*[1], lest he should have to share the profit with them.

"The other day I saw one of Keshab's disciples. A play was being staged at Keshab's house. I saw that fellow dancing with his son in his arms. I

[1] Religious theatrical performances

understand that he delivers lectures. There is no knowing who is going to teach him!"

Trailokya sings: The waves of love and bliss are rising high in the sea of Knowledge and Bliss Absolute[1].

The song over, Sri Ramakrishna says to Trailokya, "Do please sing that song: O Mother, make me mad with Thy love."

[1] *Chidananda*

Section IX

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with Pundit Shashadhar and other Devotees

Chapter I

Kali is Brahman – Brahman, the Absolute, and His Power are inseparable

Sri Ramakrishna is seated in the aforesaid room on a mat spread on the floor. Pundit Shashadhar is seated close to him. Many devotees are sharing the mat with them. Others are sitting on the bare floor. Surendra, Baburam, M., Harish, Latu, Hazra, Mani Mallick and other devotees are present. Thakur is talking about Pundit Padmalochan, who was the court pundit for the King of Burdwan. It is about four o'clock in the afternoon.

It is Monday, 30 June 1884. Pundit Shashadhar had met and talked with Thakur in Calcutta six days ago, on the day of the holy Rathayatra[1]. Today he has come to Dakshineswar, accompanied by Bhudhar Chatterji and his elder brother. Pundit Shashadhar is staying with his brother in Calcutta.

The Pundit follows the path of jnana yoga. Thakur is explaining to him that both the Absolute and the phenomenal world belong to the same Being. One who is Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute has assumed various forms to perform His divine sport. While talking of these things, Thakur loses external consciousness. He speaks, intoxicated

[1] The Car festival

by a divine mood. He says to the Pundit, "Brother, the Absolute is immutable, immovable like Mount Sumeru. But He who is 'immovable' is also 'movable'."

Drunk with the joy of ecstatic love, Thakur begins to sing. His divinely sweet voice puts to shame even the voice of the celestial musicians[1]. He sings song after song –

Song –

Is there anybody who knows Kali, She, the consort of *Kala*[2]? Even the six schools of philosophy do not reveal Her.

The yogi meditates on Her at the Muladhara[3] and Sahasrara[4].

A goose and a gander move around in this wilderness of lotuses, accompanying one another. They are *Kala* and His consort.

My Divine Mother is the most beloved of Shiva (the Absolute), even as Sita is the most beloved of Rama.

She appears in Her majesty in each finite being[5] as an individual, just as She pleases. She is Ichhamai[6].

Mahakala (the Spirit of Eternity, the Absolute) knows the greatness of my Divine Mother – greatness which is hidden from the view of ordinary beings. Who else can know Her so well?

My Divine Mother gives birth to the Universe – now think of Her greatness!

---

[1] Gandharvas
[2] The Spirit of Eternity
[3] Muladhara is the first lotus with four petals and is the root of the Sushumna in the spine. The Kundalini is coiled up at the Muladhara lotus.
[4] Sahasrara is the lotus of a thousand petals, which is the goal of the spiritual energy (Shakti) awakened by the yogi at the Muladhara. When the Shakti reaches the Sahasrara and becomes united with Shiva or Brahman, the result is samadhi, Brahmajnana.
[5] Ghat
[6] She has Her own way in everything

Says Prasad (the poet): 'To think that one can know Her is to think that one can swim across the mighty ocean. One can only laugh at the idea.'

I understand this well enough with my mind; alas, my heart will not see it. It is a dwarf aspiring to reach the moon.

Song –

Is the Divine Mother the daughter of such an ordinary mother,

By repeating whose name, Mahesh (Shiva) remains alive even after drinking deadly poison[1]?

By whose glance, creation, preservation and dissolution come about?

She who keeps the infinite universe in Her belly,

By whom the gods free themselves of their duties by taking refuge at Her feet,

Underneath whose feet Mahadeva, the God of gods, lies prostrate?

Song –

Is my Divine Mother only the chaste wife of Shiva, the Absolute?

She to whom the God of Death[2] pays his obeisance?

Killing foes in the garb of the naked one, She stands on the breast of Mahakala.

O my mind, do tell me how it happens that She kicks the chest of Her Master.

Says Prasad, take the sport of the Divine Mother as wild and violent.

O mind, aspire with care and your intellect will be purified.

---

[1] The gods and demons churned the ocean to obtain the nectar of immortality. The churning also produced deadly poison. To save mankind from the poison, Lord Shiva drank it all.

[2] *Kala*

Song –

I don't take ordinary wine. I say, 'Victory to Kali[1]' and drink the wine of Everlasting Bliss.

When I repeat the Mother's name, it intoxicates my mind and people call me a drunkard.

Taking the Guru's seed mantra and having added the spice of worldly action[2] to it,

My mind becomes drunk by taking only drops of the wine distilled by spiritual wisdom[3].

The container [body] is full of His seed mantra, which I purify by uttering Tara, the name of Divine Mother.

Says Prasad, by drinking such a Wine of Everlasting Bliss, one obtains the four pursuits of life (righteousness, wealth, fulfillment of desire and liberation[4]).

Song –

Can everybody gain the treasure of Mother Shyama?

This foolish mind does not know how priceless this inherited treasure is.

Even with all his penance, indeed rare is Shiva's vision of Her.

Only when the mind is intoxicated, can one attain the crimson feet of the Divine Mother.

Thakur's state of ecstasy relaxes somewhat. He stops singing and is silent for awhile, then he gets up and sits down on the smaller cot.

The Pundit is charmed to hear the songs. He says to Thakur humbly, "Is there going to be any more singing?"

---

[1] Jai Kali
[2] Pravritti
[3] Jnana
[4] The four fruits: Dharma, artha, kama and moksha

After a short time Thakur resumes singing –

Song –

The kite of my mind was soaring high up in the sky of the feet of Mother Shyama.

The rough wind of misdeeds made it fall circling to the ground.

Maya's pull made it heavy and I could not raise it again.

It became entangled in the string of love for wife and children.

Alas! The framework of jnana [of the kite] is rent. One may pull it upwards, but it falls down.

It has lost its bow, so how can it fly? The six passions[1] have overpowered it.

It was tied to the string of bhakti. While playing, it fell into illusion.

O Nareschandra! Rather then weep or laugh, it was better not to have played at all.

Song –

This time I have given my whole mind.

I have learned divine fervour[2] from one well versed in it.

O Mother, I have found a man from a country which has no night.

And now I can no longer distinguish day from night.

I have rendered barren all ritualistic devotions.

Song –

I have surrendered myself at the Fearless feet of the Divine Mother. Am I afraid of Yama any more?

---

[1] Lust, anger, avarice, delusion, pride and envy
[2] Bhava

I have tied to the top tuft of my hair the almighty mantra of the name of Kali,

Having sold my body in the mart of the world, I have bought the name of Durga.

Hearing "I have bought the name of Durga," the Pundit begins to shed tears. Thakur sings again –

Song –

I have planted the wish-fulfilling tree[1], the name of Mother Kali, in my heart.

I am waiting to open my heart to Yama[2] to show him the name of Kali residing there.

I have thrown out the six bad beings[3] that were dwelling in my body.

Says Ramprasad, I am prepared to start my journey of life, taking the name of Durga.

Song –

O my mind, abide by yourself,

Do not go to any other's house.

Search within yourself,

You will find there all you seek.

Having sung this song, Thakur says, "Bhakti is better than mukti (liberation)."

Song –

I am not hesitant to grant mukti (liberation); I hesitate to grant pure bhakti.

Who wins pure love surpasses all. He is served by all.

He triumphs over the three worlds.

---

[1] *Kalpataru*
[2] King of Death
[3] Six passions, namely lust, anger, avarice, delusion, pride and envy

Listen, O Chandravali[1], I will tell you of love.

One may gain liberation, but rare indeed is bhakti.

Because of bhakti, I became King Bali's doorkeeper in the nether world.

Only in Vrindavan can one find pure love.

Except for cowherd boys and milkmaids, no one knows its secret.

Because of bhakti in Nanda's house, taking him as my father, I carried his burden on my head.

Chapter II

Study of scriptures and learning are futile – austerities are essential – man of vijnana

The Pundit has studied the *Vedas* and other scriptures. He enjoys discussing philosophy. Thakur, seated on the smaller cot, looks at him and instructs him during the course of conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Pundit) — Certainly there are the *Vedas* and other scriptures. But unless one practices spiritual disciplines and austerities, it is not possible to realize God.

"One cannot see God in the six systems of philosophy, or in the *Vedas*, or the *Tantras*.

"Even so, one should understand the scriptures and act according to their injunctions. Once a person lost a letter and couldn't remember where he had left it. He began to look for it with a lamp. Two or three people set themselves to the task of searching for it and at last it was found. The message of the letter was, 'Send five seers of

[1] One of the gopis at Vrindavan

sandesh[1] and a piece of wearing-cloth[2].' Having read it, the man threw the letter away, for it was no longer of any use. Now he only had to buy five seers of sandesh and a piece of cloth and send them."

The art of teaching – comparison between reading, hearing and seeing

"Higher than reading is hearing and higher than hearing is seeing. One internalizes more when one hears from the lips of the guru, or from a holy man. Then one doesn't have to think about the non-essential part of the scriptures.

"Hanuman said, 'Brother, I don't know the phases of the moon, or the position of the planets. I only contemplate Rama.'

"Seeing is far better than hearing. All doubts vanish when you see. The scriptures talk of so many things. It is all futile without having the direct vision of God, without having love and devotion for His lotus feet, without purification of the heart. The almanac forecasts twenty measures of rainfall. But squeeze the almanac and not a single drop of water falls out. Not even one drop falls."

How long does one have to reason? Till one realizes God – who is a vijnani?

"How long does one have to reason about the text of the scriptures? As long as one does not have the

[1] A kind of sweetmeat in Bengal made of cheese and sugar
[2] Dhoti

direct realization of God. How long does the bee hum? As long as it does not sit on a flower. When it sits on a flower to drink honey, it doesn't make any sound.

"The truth is that one may talk with others even after God-realization. But this conversation only revolves around the divine Bliss of God – it is like a drunkard crying, 'Victory to Kali.'[1] Besides, even a bee hums indistinctly after sipping honey from a flower."

Is Thakur perhaps hinting of his own state by referring to a vijnani?

"The jnani reasons, 'Not this, not this.' Reasoning in this way, he reaches a point of Divine Bliss, and that is Brahman.

"What is the nature of a jnani? He follows the injunctions of the scriptures.

"Once I was taken to Chanak and met a number of sadhus. Some of them were sewing. (All laugh.) They left their sewing when they saw us. They sat cross-legged and began to talk to us. (All laugh.)

"A jnani does not talk about spiritual things unless you broach the subject of God. He will normally ask you, 'How are you doing now? Is all well in the family?'

"But the vijnani conducts himself differently. He doesn't care about anything – maybe his

[1] Thakur means that the drunkard can hardly say anything other than 'Victory to Kali,' on account of his drunkenness.

wearing cloth is off, or held under his arm as children will do.

"He who knows that the Lord exists is a jnani. He who knows that there is fire in firewood is a man of knowledge. But the vijnani is he who makes fire with the wood, cooks his food over it, and eats to his fill.

"The eight fetters[1] fall off the vijnani. He only retains the semblance of lust, anger and the rest."

The Pundit — 'bhidyate hradayagranthi chidyante sarvasaṁśayāḥ.' The knots of the heart are cut and all doubts vanish.

His earlier story – visit to Krishnakishore's house – Thakur's state of a vijnani

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes. A ship was sailing on the ocean. Suddenly all its iron joints, nails, and screws began to fall out. It was passing a mound of magnetic stone, so all the iron began to loosen.

"I used to visit Krishnakishore's house. One day when I went to his house, he asked me, 'Why do you chew betel leaf?' I said, 'If I feel like it, I will chew betel-leaf, look at myself in the mirror, or dance naked among a thousand females.' Krishnakishore's wife scolded him, saying, 'You don't know how to talk to people! What have you said to Ramakrishna?'

"In this state [of vijnana], passions like lust, anger and the rest are burnt up, though the

[1] Hatred, shame, fear, lineage, pride of good conduct, secretiveness, caste and grief

physical body remains the same. One looks just like anybody else. But inside one has become hollow and absolutely pure."

A Devotee — Does the body last after God-realization?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, in the case of a few people, the body remains alive to do some work – to instruct mankind. Sins vanish with a dip in the Ganges and one attains liberation. But one is not cured of one's blindness. Of course, one does not have to be reborn again and again to reap the fruit of sinful actions, which would otherwise have resulted in several rebirths. One has to live till the momentum of the actions of previous births has been exhausted. However, the impetus of current actions[1] does not give rise to future births. In the case of such a person, when passions like lust and anger have been burned up, the body remains to perform a few actions.

The Pundit — This is called samskara[2].

Sri Ramakrishna — The vijnani always sees the presence of God. That is why he is in such a relaxed state of mind. He sees God even with his eyes open. At times he comes down from the Absolute[3] to the phenomenal world[4], and at other times he goes up from the phenomenal world to the Absolute.

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[1] After God-realization
[2] Tendencies inherited from one's past births
[3] Nitya
[4] Lila

The Pundit — I don't understand this concept.

Sri Ramakrishna — The jnani reaches the Eternal and Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda by discriminating, 'Not this, not this[1].' He reasons, saying to himself, 'God is not the embodied being, He is neither the universe nor the twenty-four cosmic principles[2].' Reasoning thus, he reaches the Absolute and sees that God has become everything and dwells in all – embodied beings, the universe, and the twenty-four cosmic principles.

"One must curdle milk and churn it to extract butter. However, when you have taken the butter out, you observe that the butter indeed belongs to the buttermilk and the buttermilk belongs to the butter. The bark of a tree belongs to the pith and the pith belongs to the bark."

The Pundit (to Bhudhar, smiling) — Did you understand? It is very difficult to comprehend.

Sri Ramakrishna — When there is butter, there must also be buttermilk. If you think butter, the idea of buttermilk also comes to mind – for the reason that there can be no butter without buttermilk. Therefore, when you accept the Absolute[3], you have also to accept the phenomenal world[4]. It is a case of involution and evolution. One

---

[1] Neti, neti

[2] They are the following, viz. – the five gross elements (earth, water, fire, air, space); the five pranas (vital airs) (prana, udana, samana, vyana, apana); the five organs of sense; the five organs of work; the mind; the determinative faculty (buddhi); the ego; chitta (mind-stuff)

[3] Nitya

[4] Lila

attains this state after having the direct realization of both aspects of God: Personal and Impersonal. The Personal God is symbolic of Consciousness and the Impersonal God is the Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda.

"God indeed has become everything. Therefore, 'the world is a mansion of joy' for the vijnani. For the jnani, however, this world is 'a veil of deception'. Ramprasad called it 'a veil of deception'. That is why somebody rejoined –

> This world is indeed a thing of joy; let me eat and drink and be merry.
>
> O physician[1], you are a fool! You only see things on the surface – and I have understood the secret.
>
> King Janaka, the great royal sage, was he inferior in any respect to the holy man who has given up the world?
>
> Oh no, it was he who was loyal to both matter and Spirit, who realized God and at the same time drank his cup of milk. (Laughter.)

"The vijnani has enjoyed the Bliss of God in a special way. Some have heard of milk, others have seen it, and yet there are some who have drunk it. The vijnani has drunk milk, enjoyed it, and been nourished by it."

> Thakur remains silent for awhile and asks the Pundit to have a smoke. The Pundit goes to the long southeastern verandah to smoke.

[1] Ramprasad belonged to the caste of physician.

Chapter III

Jnana and vijnana – Thakur and the rishis of the *Vedas*

The Pundit returns and sits on the floor with the devotees. Thakur, seated on the smaller cot, resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Pundit) — I say this to you. There are three kinds of joy: the joy of worldly enjoyment[1], the joy of worship[2] and the bliss of Brahman[3]. The joy of 'lust and gold' is the joy of worldly enjoyment, it is the joy in which worldly people always remain occupied. The joy of worship is that which one enjoys when chanting the name and glories of God. And the bliss of Brahman is the joy of the vision of God[4]. The rishis became free-willed[5] after experiencing the bliss of Brahman.

"Chaitanyadeva used to experience three kinds of spiritual states: the inmost state, the semi-conscious state, and the conscious state. In the inmost state, he would have the vision of God and pass into samadhi – he would attain the state of *Jada* Samadhi. In the semi-conscious state, he would retain partial awareness of the external world. And in the conscious state, he would sing the name and glories of God."

Hazra (to the Pundit) — So all your doubts are now resolved.

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[1] *Vishyananda*
[2] *Bhajanananda*
[3] *Brahmananda*
[4] Bhagavan
[5] That is, they could step beyond rules and regulations

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Pundit) — What is samadhi? In samadhi, the mind becomes merged with the Absolute. The jnani passes into *Jada* Samadhi – in it, I-consciousness vanishes. The samadhi experienced in bhakti yoga is called *Chetana* Samadhi. In it, one retains the ego of the servant and Master relationship, the ego of lover and Beloved, or the ego of enjoyer and Bliss. The Lord is the Master and the devotee is the servant; the Lord is the Beloved and the devotee the lover; the Lord is the Fountain of Bliss and the devotee its enjoyer. The devotee does not want to become sugar; he wants to eat and enjoy it.

The Pundit — What will happen if God dissolves the ego completely, if He makes sugar of the devotee?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Feel free to say what you have on your mind. 'Be frank for once, mother Kaushalya[1].' (All laugh.) Don't the scriptures talk of Narada, Sanaka, Sanatana, Sananda and Sanatkumara?

The Pundit — Yes sir, the scriptures mention them.

Sri Ramakrishna — Though they were jnanis, they retained their ego of devotion. Haven't you read the *Bhagavata*?

The Pundit — I have read it partially, but not all of it.

---

[1] A reference to an episode in the Ramayana about Kaushalya, the mother of Rama

Sri Ramakrishna — Pray to God. He is compassionate. Will He not listen to the words of His devotee? He is the wish-fulfilling tree[1]. Approach Him and ask: He will grant your wish.

The Pundit — I haven't thought much about it before. Now I understand.

Sri Ramakrishna — After one attains knowledge of the Absolute, God permits a little ego to remain. This ego is the 'I of the devotee,' or the 'I of knowledge'. It is with this 'I' that one enjoys His infinite play. Rubbing the pestle for a long time, it was reduced to a very small size. But when it fell into the forest of willows, it brought the destruction of the entire clan of Yadus[2]. That is why the vijnani keeps the 'I of devotion' or the 'I of knowledge', to enjoy the Bliss of God and to teach mankind.

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[1] *Kalpataru*

[2] The childhood friends of Samba, one of Krishna's sons, playfully disguised him as a pregnant woman by dressing him in female clothes and hanging an iron pestle below his waist. They presented him before a group of ascetics and asked them what sort of child the woman would give birth to. Enraged that a joke had been played on them, the munis proclaimed a curse that the iron pestle would be the ruin of the entire clan of Yadus. Fearfully, the boys took the pestle to the ocean and rubbed it for a very long time. The particles that fell from it, on striking the ground, became strong willow reeds. The boys threw the last piece of pestle into the sea.

In the meantime Krishna's clan, the Yadus, had become overbearingly vain and arrogant and they began to fight among themselves. At last they took the powerful willow reeds sprung from the pestle dust and, with them as weapons, fought each other to the death. Krishna, having decided that it was time that he also pass on, bade his father and his wives farewell and seated himself under a tree for meditation. Only one of his legs was not obscured by the leafy and outreaching branches of the tree. A hunter mistook him for a deer and killed him with an arrow, the point of which was the last piece from the pestle that had been thrown into the sea. Thus did the munis' curse find fulfillment.

Rishis had timid natures and were easily frightened – a new light on the Vedanta

"The rishis were timid and easily frightened. Do you know what their attitude was? 'Let me somehow get my own salvation; who knows what will happen in the future? So who can think for others?' A piece of dry or rotten wood somehow is able to float on water, but if even a bird sits on it, it sinks. A heavy log[1] not only floats, but also carries a number of animals. A steamship crosses the ocean and also takes people across.

"Religious teachers like Narada are vijnanis; they are more courageous than other rishis. They are like expert checker players who call out, 'What do you want, a six or a five of the dice?' And lo! Each time he throws the right number! What an expert player! And this fellow twirls his mustaches as he plays!

"Jnanis are afraid. They are like amateur chess players who are anxious to move a piece to the safety zone. The vijnani, on the other hand, has no fear of anything. He has had a direct vision of both aspects of God, Personal and Impersonal. He has talked, communed, with God – he has enjoyed the Bliss of God.

"The vijnani feels Bliss when, through contemplating God, his mind merges in the Indivisible[2]. Again he is in Bliss when he keeps his mind on the divine play, the phenomenal world, without his mind being merged in the Absolute.

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[1] Bahaduri wood
[2] Akhanda

"A mere jnani is monotonous. He only discriminates, 'Not this, not that; all this is like a dream.' 'I have raised both my hands[1]'. That is why I accept everything [both the Absolute and the phenomenal world].

"A woman went to see her weaver friend who was spinning yarn of different kinds of silk. The weaver friend was very happy to see her. She said, 'Friend, I am so happy that you have visited my home; I cannot express my joy. Let me get some refreshments for you.' The weaver friend went out of the room. While she was away, her visitor was tempted by multi-coloured yarn of silk. She hid a bundle of it under her arm. The weaver came back with the refreshments and served them to her with great enthusiasm. But looking at her silk yarn, she understood that her friend had pinched a bundle of it. She thought of a stratagem to recover her yarn.

"She said, 'Friend, we have not seen each other for a long time. This is a very happy day. Let's dance together.' The visitor friend said, 'Yes friend, I, too, feel great joy.' So they began to dance. The hostess saw that her friend was dancing without raising her arms. She said, 'Come, friend, let's dance with our arms raised, it's such a happy day today!' The visitor friend began to dance, but keeping one arm raised and the other pressing her side. The hostess said, 'My dear, what is this, dancing with only one arm raised! Let us dance with both hands raised. See how I am dancing with both hands raised?' But the visitor laughed, still danced pressing one arm to her side, with the other

[1] Refer to the parable next to understand this statement

raised. She continued to dance and said, 'One dances as one knows, friend.'

"I don't press one arm to my side. Both of my hands are free. I have no fear. I accept both the Absolute and the phenomenal world, the Nitya and the lila."

> Does Thakur mean that the jnani cannot dance with both hands raised because of his desire for name and fame, and desire for liberation? Does he mean that the jnani cannot accept both the Absolute and the phenomenal world and fears that he might get bound, but that the vijnani has no such fear?

Sri Ramakrishna — I said to Keshab Sen that he could not succeed spiritually without renouncing his ego. He said, 'If I do that, I won't be able to keep my organization intact.' Then I said to him: I am only asking you to renounce the 'unripe I', the 'rascal I'. There is no harm in retaining the 'ripe I', the 'I of a child', the 'I of God's servant' and the 'I of knowledge'. The 'I of a worldly man,' the 'I of ignorance[1],' and the 'unripe I' are like a stick which divides the water of the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda into two parts. On the other hand, the 'I of God's servant,' the 'child's I,' or the 'I of knowledge' is like a line drawn on the surface of water. One clearly sees that there is one expanse of water. The line appears to divide the water into two, but in reality one sees one expanse of water.

"Shankaracharya retained the 'I of knowledge' to teach mankind."

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[1] Avidya

After attaining the knowledge of the Absolute, some retain the 'ego of a devotee' – attitude of gopis

"God retains the 'I of knowledge,' or the 'I of a devotee' in many people, even after they attain the knowledge of the Absolute. Hanuman had the attitude of a servant of God, of a devotee, after having the direct vision of both aspects of God, Personal and Impersonal. He said to Ramachandra, 'Rama, at times I think of You as the whole and myself as a part of You. Sometimes I say to myself that I am Your servant and You the Master. And then, Rama, when I attain the Highest Knowledge, I see that You indeed are I and I am You.'

"Suffering the pangs of separation from Krishna, Yashoda went to Radha. Noticing her distress, Radha revealed her real nature to Yashoda, saying, 'Krishna is *Chidatma*, Absolute Consciousness, and I am *Chitshakti*, His Primal Power. Mother, ask me for a boon.' Yashoda said, 'Mother, I don't want knowledge of the Absolute. Only grant the boon that I may always see the form of Gopala[1] in my meditation, that I may ever associate with the company of Krishna's devotees, that I may serve the devotees of God, and that I may always chant the name and glories of God.'

"The gopis once wished to see the divine form of the Lord. Krishna asked them to dive into the Jamuna. As they dived, they found themselves in Vaikuntha[2] where they had the vision of the Lord endowed with six divine powers. But the gopis did

[1] Baby Krishna
[2] The abode of Vishnu

not like it. They said to Krishna, 'We only want to see our Gopala, we only want to serve him – please grant this, we want nothing else.'

"Before going to Mathura, Krishna tried to impart the knowledge of the Absolute to the gopis. He said, 'I am within and without every being. Why should you see only one of my forms?' The gopis said, 'Krishna, are you thinking of leaving us? Is that the reason you are imparting the knowledge of the Absolute?'

"Do you know what the attitude of the gopis is? We belong to Radha and Radha belongs to us."

A Devotee — Does this 'I of a devotee' ever disappear altogether?

Sri Ramakrishna and the Vedanta

Sri Ramakrishna — The 'I of a devotee' does disappear completely at times. Having attained the knowledge of the Absolute, one merges into samadhi. I, too, lose I-consciousness, but not all the time. Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti – one cannot stay long at ti [the highest note]. One has to come down again to the lower notes. I say to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, please don't give me the knowledge of the Absolute.' Formerly many believers in the Personal God used to visit me. Since then the Brahmajnanis[1] have started arriving. During that period I would remain in samadhi most of the time, having lost all external consciousness. And when I would regain outer

[1] Members of the Brahmo Samaj who believed in the Formless Brahman

consciousness, I would pray to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, please don't give me the knowledge of the Absolute.'

The Pundit — Does God listen to our prayers?

Sri Ramakrishna — The Lord is a kalpataru, the wish-fulfilling tree. You will certainly receive whatever you ask of Him. But you have to stand near the kalpataru when you ask for something. Only then is your wish fulfilled.

"But then there is something special. God knows one's inner feelings. Whatever one cherishes while practicing spiritual disciplines indeed comes to pass – as one desires, so one gains. A magician showed his magic feats to a king and now and then he said, 'Oh king, give me money, give me cloth.' As he said this, his tongue twisted and got stuck to his palate. At once he had suspension of breath[1]. Now he could neither speak, nor make any sound, and he became motionless. Thinking him dead, they made a brick grave and buried him in that posture. A thousand years later someone dug up that grave. People saw a person seated in the grave merged in samadhi. Taking him as a holy man, they began to worship him. When they shook and moved him, his tongue became detached from his palate. The fellow then regained outer-consciousness and shouted, 'Just see my magic! See my feats! Oh king! Give, give me money, give me cloth.'

"I would cry and say to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, destroy my tendency to reason!' "

[1] Kumbhaka

The Pundit — Did you, too, have it (the tendency to reason)?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, at one time.

The Pundit — If you tell us how you got rid of this tendency to reason, we might also free ourselves. How did you get rid of it?

Sri Ramakrishna — It just happened, somehow.

Chapter IV

Aim of life is God-realization – the paths to it

God's splendour and the joy of His Bliss – some people don't want the knowledge of His splendour

Thakur is silent for awhile before he resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna — The Lord is a kalpataru, a wish-fulfilling tree. One should pray standing near it. Then one receives whatever one asks of Him.

"How many things has the Lord created! He has created the limitless universe; why do I need to know of His limitless splendours? If you have the desire to know them, first attain God, then He Himself will tell you about them. Why do you need to know how many buildings and how many company shares Jadu Mallick has? What you must do is to somehow talk with this gentleman, even though you have to leap over a ditch or entreat him or be pushed aside by his gatekeeper. After becoming acquainted with him, he will tell you all

about his wealth if you ask him. Moreover, when you have talked to the gentleman, his officials will also show you respect. (All laugh.)

"There are some who don't want to know about God's splendours. Why do I care to know how many litres of wine are in the tavern? I become intoxicated by only one bottle of wine. Why should I desire the knowledge of God's splendours? I am already intoxicated with just a little wine."

Path of Jnana Yoga is very difficult – avataras and the like are ever-perfect[1]

"Bhakti yoga and Jnana Yoga are both paths to realize God. You may take any path and you will reach Him. The path of bhakti is an easy path. The path of jnana and discrimination, however, is difficult.

"Why reason which of the paths is better? I have been talking to Vijay about it for many days. I said to him, 'A person used to pray: Oh Lord, please tell me who You are and what Your attributes are.'

"The path of knowledge and discrimination is difficult. Parvati, revealing Her different forms to her father, Giriraj[2], said: 'Father, if you want the knowledge of Brahman, associate with holy men.'

"It is not possible to express Brahman in words. The *Rama Gita* says that Brahman can be described only by indirect hints. It is like saying that the 'cowherd village' overlooks the Ganges. By saying that the 'cowherd village' overlooks the

[1] *Nityasiddhas*
[2] Himalaya, the king of mountains

Ganges, one indirectly states that the 'cowherd village' is on the bank of the Ganges.

"Why should one not attain the direct realization of the formless Brahman? But it is exceedingly difficult. When one renounces all sense-objects – of form, taste, smell, speech and touch – and the mind is merged, only then one attains the inner experience of God[1]. But then one knows only this much about Brahman, that It exists."

The Pundit — 'astītyopalabdhavya' – God is experienced as Existence.

Sri Ramakrishna — One must establish a relationship with God to attain Him – either the attitude of a hero, or of a female lover of the Lord[2], or of a handmaid, or of a child.

Mani Mallick — Only then can one be steadfast in one's spiritual life.

Sri Ramakrishna — I lived with the attitude of a female companion of God for many days. I used to say, 'I am the maidservant of the All-Blissful Mother, Brahmamayi. Oh handmaids, make me your handmaiden. Saying that I am the maidservant of Brahmamayi, I will walk about proudly.'

"There are some who realize God without practicing spiritual disciplines. They are known as *nityasiddhas*, or ever-perfect. On the other hand,

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[1] *Bodhebodha*
[2] Sakhi; gopi of Vraja

those who realize God after practicing spiritual disciplines[1], such as repetition of the Name and other austerities, are called *sadhanasiddha*, perfected by spiritual disciplines. However, there are some devotees who are perfected by God's grace; they are called *kripasiddha*. For example, when a lamp is brought inside a room that has been lying dark for a thousand years, it is illuminated in a moment.

"And then there are some devotees who suddenly attain God-vision; they are called *hathatsiddha*. For example, a poor man's son is suddenly noticed by a rich man. The aristocrat gives him his daughter in marriage, along with land, house, carriage, servants and maids – he now owns them all.

"And then some devotees are perfected in a dream; they are called *svapnasiddha*. They attain the vision of God in a dream."

Surendra (laughing) — Then I'll go to sleep now. I'll wake up an aristocrat.

Sri Ramakrishna (affectionately) — You are already an aristocrat. Add the vowel 'a' to the letter 'k,' it becomes 'ka'. It is futile to add another vowel 'a' to it. But even if you do, it will still be 'ka'. (All laugh.)

"The *nityasiddha* is of an altogether different class. He is, for instance, like tinder stick[2]. Rub it a little and it produces fire. Even without rubbing, it

[1] Sadhana
[2] *Arani* wood; a special kind of wood that produces fire by rubbing

gives fire. The *nityasiddha* realizes God with very little spiritual disciplines, sometimes without performing any spiritual practices at all.

"However, the *nityasiddha*, does practice spiritual disciplines after attaining God. He is like the pumpkin or the gourd plants which first bear fruit, and then flowers."

The Pundit, hearing of 'the pumpkin or gourd plant bearing fruit first,' laughs.

Sri Ramakrishna — And the *nityasiddha* is like the homa bird. Its mother soars high up in the sky. When the chick is born, it falls toward the earth. It grows wings and opens its eyes during the fall – but before striking the ground and hurting itself, it rushes up toward its mother, screaming, 'Where are you mother, where?' Remember, Prahlada shed streams of tears of love as soon as he wrote the alphabet 'K[1]'.

Is Thakur describing his own state by his illustration of the tinder stick and the homa bird, in relation to the *Nityasiddha*?

Thakur seems very happy to see the humility of the Pundit. He talks to the devotees about the Pundit's good nature.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — He has a very fine nature. It is not difficult to drive a nail into a mud wall. But when you try to drive it into a stone wall, its point breaks and no hole appears in the stone. There are people whose spiritual

[1] The alphabet 'K' reminded Prahlada of Krishna, his Chosen Ideal

consciousness is not awakened, though they may hear about God a thousand times. They are like a crocodile whose hide remains unaffected even when hit by a sword.

Spiritual practice is better than learning and scholarship – discrimination[1]

The Pundit — One can injure a crocodile by thrusting a spear into its belly. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What use is it to read so many scriptures? It is philosophy! (All laugh.)

The Pundit (smiling) — Yes, it is mere philosophy.

Sri Ramakrishna — What use is it to talk a lot? When learning archery, one first aims at a banana tree, then at a reed, next a wick, and then at a flying bird.

"That is why one should first concentrate the mind on the Personal God.

"And then there are devotees who have gone beyond the three gunas. They are called *trigunatita* devotees. For example, Narada and others like him are nitya devotees, devoted to God eternally. Such devotees consider Krishna as the embodiment of Spirit[2], His Abode as Spirit, and His devotee as Spirit too. To them the Lord is eternal[3], His devotee is eternal and His abode is eternal too.

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[1] Viveka
[2] Chinmaya
[3] Nitya

"Those who reason and discriminate, saying, 'Not this, not this,' don't believe in God-incarnate[1]. Hazra says well: the Divine Incarnation is for the devotee and not for the jnani. The jnani is content with the attitude of 'Soham[2].' "

Thakur and the devotees remain silent for awhile. Now the Pundit speaks.

The Pundit — Sir, how does one get rid of an insensitive attitude – when one sees someone laughing and the mind thinks of the muscles and nerves? Or when seeing someone in sorrow, the mind goes to the nervous system?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — That is why Narayan Shastri used to say that studying scriptures has its pitfalls. Arguing and reasoning may bring about a downfall.

The Pundit — Sir, is there no way out? Please clarify a little.

Sri Ramakrishna — There is a way out. It is discrimination. A song says[3] –

Ask – about the Lord – the son called viveka who knows the Real (God) from the unreal phenomenal world.

"The way is: discrimination, nonattachment[4], and love for God. Without practicing discrimination, one

[1] Avatar
[2] I am He
[3] For complete song, refer to Volume I, Section II, Chapter VI of this book
[4] Vairagya

cannot make a correct statement. Samadhyayi, after expounding religion for some time, said, 'God is devoid of sweetness and bliss.' That is like saying, 'There is a cowshed full of horses at my maternal uncle's house.' Do horses live in cowsheds?

(Smiling) "You have now become a *chanabara*[1]. It will not only be good for you to remain soaked in syrup for three or four days, but also good for others. Just for three or four days."

The Pundit (smiling) — The *chanabara* has been burnt into coal.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — No, no. It has taken the brown colour of a cockroach.

Hazra — It has been fried well. It will now soak up the syrup nicely.

His earlier story – instruction by Totapuri – significance of the *Gita* – yearn for God

Sri Ramakrishna — You see, there is no need to read the scriptures a lot. Too much reading inclines one to reason and argue. The Naked One (Totapuri) taught me that the essence of the *Gita* is what you hear when the word Gita is repeated ten times. In other words, by repeating 'Gita' ten times, it becomes '*tyagi*,' renunciation.

"The path is to cultivate discrimination, nonattachment, and love for the Lord. What kind of

[1] Bengali sweetmeat made of fried cheese

love? Such love that you yearn for Him with heart and soul, the way a cow runs longingly after her calf."

The Pundit — The *Vedas* say exactly the same thing: 'We call on You the way the cow bellows for its calf.'

Sri Ramakrishna — Weep with yearning for God. If one can renounce everything through developing discrimination and nonattachment, one can have the direct vision of God.

"That yearning brings about God-intoxication, whether you follow the path of knowledge, or of love and devotion. The sage Durvasa was mad with the Knowledge of God.

"There is a great deal of difference between the jnana of a householder and that of an all-renouncing sannyasin. The knowledge of the householder is like the light of an earthen lamp that only lights the room. The householder cannot understand beyond his body, home and family. But the knowledge of an all-renouncing sannyasin is like the radiance of the sun. One can see both inside and outside the room with its light. Chaitanyadeva's knowledge was like that of the sun – the radiance of the sun of knowledge. Further, he was also endowed with the soothing light of the moon of love and devotion. He had both the Knowledge of the Absolute and ecstatic love for God."

Is Thakur describing his own state by referring to the state of Chaitanyadeva?

Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga – bhakti according to Narada in the age of Kali

"Affirmation[1] and negation[2]. Love, devotion and feeling for God[3] is a positive path; the negative path[4] is different. You are talking of the path of negation. But it creates a difficult situation in that the guru and the disciple do not see one another as different. Shukadeva went to Janaka for instruction about the knowledge of Brahman. Janaka said, 'First you have to make an offering of the teacher's fee[5]. When you have attained the knowledge of Brahman, you will not make any offering because then there will remain no difference between guru and disciple.'

"Both the path of affirmation and negation are ways to realize the same goal – there are numberless beliefs and numerous paths. But there is a special point. According to Narada, bhakti is the injunction for the age of Kali. On this path one first develops love and devotion to God, then it matures into bhava[6]. Higher than bhava is mahabhava[7] and prema[8]. An ordinary mortal does not attain mahabhava and prema. He who has attained it has attained the Substance, namely realized God."

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[1] *Bhavamukha chaitanya*
[2] *Abhavamukha chaitanya*
[3] Bhakti
[4] Knowledge and discrimination
[5] Dakshina
[6] Matured bhakti, a state of ecstasy
[7] The highest manifestation of divine love
[8] Ecstatic love; a state in which the devotee forgets the world and his own body

The Pundit — Sir, when one teaches, one must explain in different ways.

Sri Ramakrishna — When you preach, eliminate the 'head and tail[1]'.

Chapter V

Kali is Brahman, Brahman and his Power are inseparable – harmony of all religions

The Pundit is talking to Mani Mallick, who is a member of the Brahmo Samaj. The Pundit raises strong arguments about the good and bad aspects of the Brahmo Samaj. Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot and watches them talk. He smiles. Sometimes he intervenes. "This is the tamasic aspect of sattva[2]," he says, "the heroic attitude. This too is needed. One should not keep quiet at the sight of injustice and untruth. You may find that an unchaste woman is trying to take you from your spirituality. You then must assume the heroic attitude. You must say, 'Why, you witch, you're trying to harm my spiritual life! I'll cut you into two pieces right now!' "

Thakur then laughs and says, "Mani Mallick's faith in Brahmo doctrines is long standing. You wish to convert him to your views. Is it easy to change old tendencies so quickly? There was a Hindu who was a great devotee. He used to worship the Mother of the Universe[3] and repeat Her name constantly. When the Muslims conquered the country, they caught this devotee and converted him to Islam, saying, 'You are now a Muslim. Say Allah. You must only repeat the name of Allah.' The fellow began to repeat, 'Allah, Allah,' with great difficulty. At times he uttered,

[1] That is, focus on the essential thing
[2] Qualities that lead Godward
[3] Jagadamba

'Jagadamba' (the name of the Mother of the Universe) in spite of himself. At that, the Muslims decided to kill him. He cried, 'Save me, Sheikh! Please don't kill me. I am trying hard to repeat the name of your Allah. But our Mother of the Universe has filled me up to my throat. She is pushing your Allah out.' "(All laugh.)

(To the Pundit, smiling) "Please don't say anything to Mani Mallick**.**"

"You know how it is. People have different tastes and can only digest certain kinds of foods. God has created various religions, various faiths – for people of differing capacities. Not everybody is qualified for the knowledge of Brahman. So He has made provision for the worship of God with form. A mother brings home fish for her children and cooks it differently – as fish with curry, as fish sauce and fish with fried rice[1]. Not everyone can digest fish with fried rice, so she makes fish curry for him who has a weak stomach. Others like fish sauce, or fried fish. Just as there are people of different temperaments, there is also a difference in their fitness and capacity."

All remain silent. Thakur says to the Pundit, "Go have the darshan of the deity. Then take a stroll in the garden for awhile."

It is half past five. The Pundit and his friend rise. They will visit the shrine. Some devotees accompany them.

After some time Thakur and M. walk down together toward the brick ghat on the bank of the

[1] Pilau

Ganges. Thakur says to M., "Baburam now says: What shall I gain by studying?"

Thakur meets the Pundit on the bank of the Ganges. He says, "Are you not going to the Kali Temple? I came to make sure that you do go." The Pundit is a little embarrassed and says, "Sir, let's go together to have the darshan of the deity."

Smiling broadly, Sri Ramakrishna walks toward the Kali Temple through the courtyard. He says, "Listen to a song." He begins to sing sweetly.

> Is my Mother really black? The Naked One, of black hue, illumines my heart.

Reaching the courtyard of the chandni, he says again, "One of the songs says" –

> Lighting the fire of jnana in the chamber,
>
> Look at the Mother, the embodiment of Brahman.

Reaching the shrine, Thakur lies prostrate in obeisance. Hibiscus flowers and vilwa leaves have been placed at the holy lotus feet of the Mother. She, the three-eyed one, looks at the devotees with eyes full of affection. Her hand is raised to assure fearlessness. The Mother is clad in a Benares sari with jewelry.

Viewing the holy image, the elder brother of Bhudhar remarks, "I have heard that it was made by the sculptor, Nabin." Thakur says, "I don't know about that. What I know is that She is the image of Spirit."

Thakur, accompanied by the devotees, walks through the natmandir toward the south. Seeing the block for sacrificing goats, the Pundit remarks, "The Mother is not able to see the goats being slaughtered." (All laugh.)

Chapter VI

Thakur is now returning to his room. He says to Baburam, "Come with us." M. also joins them.

It is dusk. Thakur comes to the circular verandah west of his room and sits down. He is absorbed in divine emotion – semi-conscious to the external world. Close to him are Baburam and M.

Thakur is having difficulties these days for lack of personal service. Rakhal does not live here now. There are others, but they cannot touch Thakur in all his spiritual states [while offering service]. Thakur says to Baburam with a sign, "Do stay with me. I cannot allow just anybody to touch me in this state. It would be nice if you would stay here[1]."

God-realization and giving up work – a new 'pot' – householder devotee and unchaste woman

The Pundit has returned to Thakur's room after visiting the shrine. From the western circular verandah, Thakur says to him, "Have a little water to drink." The Pundit says, "I have not yet performed the evening worship." Immediately Thakur rises and sings, intoxicated with divine emotion –

What is the need of visiting Gaya, Ganges, Prabhas, Kashi, Kanchi or such holy places

If the lips can utter, 'Kali, Kali', Kali,' when life ebbs away?

He who calls on Kali at the three hours of dawn, noon and dusk needs no daily ritualistic worship.

Worship itself follows his footsteps, but can never overtake him.

[1] Baburam was the embodiment of purity, so could help Thakur with personal service

He can no longer concern himself with repetition of the Name, yajna, worship, or sacrificial fire.

For Madan[1] all worship and rituals mean the blood-red feet of the Mother, the embodiment of Brahman.

Intoxicated with divine love, Thakur says, "How long does one have to perform sandhya[2]? As long as the mind does not merge in Him when repeating 'Om'."

The Pundit — So I will have some water, I can perform sandhya later.

Sri Ramakrishna — I don't want to disturb the current of your personal routine. One does not renounce till the time is ripe. When the fruit is ripe, the flower falls off by itself. One should not push and tug at a coconut when it is not ripe – that would injure the tree.

Surendra is getting ready to go home. He invites his friends to come along, so that he can take them in his carriage.

Surendra — Mahendra, are you coming?

Thakur is absorbed in ecstasy – he has not come back fully to the normal state of consciousness. He says to Surendra in this state, "Don't carry more people than your horse can draw." Surendra pays his obeisance and leaves.

The Pundit leaves to perform evening service. M. and Baburam have to go to Calcutta and they are paying their obeisance to Thakur, who is still in ecstasy.

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[1] Author of the song

[2] Daily service morning, noon and evening, as laid down for the twice-born

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I can hardly speak. You must wait for awhile.

M. sits down, waiting for Thakur's command. Thakur beckons Baburam to sit. Baburam says to M., "Let's stay a little longer." Thakur says, "Fan me a little." Baburam fans him, so does M.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M., affectionately) — Why don't you visit more often?

M. — Sir, there is no particular reason. I have been busy at home.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yesterday I came to know Baburam's spiritual ideal. That is why I insist on keeping him here. A bird hatches its egg at the right hour. Do you know who they are[1]? They are pure Atman, not yet fallen into the trap of 'lust and greed'.

M. — True, sir. He has no stain yet.

Sri Ramakrishna — He is like a new pot [of clay]. Milk will not sour when put in it.

M. — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — I feel the need to keep Baburam here. I am put in various spiritual states and it is essential that such a person stay with me. Baburam says, 'I can manage to stay permanently only gradually. Otherwise, it will create difficulties

[1] Young men like Baburam who are pure in heart

at home; they will raise a row.' I say to him, 'Come on Saturdays and Sundays.'

By this time the Pundit has returned from performing evening service. He is accompanied by Bhudhar and his elder brother[1]. They are ready to eat some refreshments now.

Bhudhar's elder brother says, "Please let us know if we will succeed in spiritual life. What is the way for us?"

Sri Ramakrishna — You are a *mumukshu*[2]. One attains the Lord when one develops yearning for Him. Don't eat the food offered at the death ceremony[3]. You must live with your family like an unchaste woman. An unchaste woman attends to all her household work with full attention, but her mind remains tied night and day to her paramour. Attend to all your household work, but always keep your mind on the Lord.

The Pundit is eating his refreshments. Thakur asks him to sit to eat.

After the Pundit has finished, Sri Ramakrishna says to him, "You have read the *Gita*, no doubt. It says that there is a special power of God in one who is honoured and respected by all."

The Pundit — Whatever being is glorious, prosperous or powerful, know that to have sprung but from a spark of My splendour[4].

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[1] The elder brother of Bhudar spent his last days alone in a very holy mood at Kashi. He constantly thought about Thakur during those days.
[2] One with a burning desire for liberation
[3] Shraddha
[4] Yadyadvibhūtimatsattvaṁ śrīmadūrjitameva vā. (Gita 10:41)

Sri Ramakrishna — You have, no doubt, the power of His spark within yourself.

The Pundit — Shall I persevere in the vows that I have taken?

Thakur, reluctantly says, "Yes, you must." Then he changes the topic to sidetrack the issue.

Sri Ramakrishna — You must accept Shakti[1]. Vidyasagar asked, 'Has God given more power to some?' I replied, 'Otherwise, how can one man defeat a hundred men? Why is Queen Victoria respected and honoured if not because of God's power?' Then I asked him whether he agreed to this fact. He replied, 'Yes, I do.'

The Pundit rises to take leave of Thakur and offers him his obeisance by touching his head to the floor. His companions and friends also salute Thakur.

Thakur says, "Please come again. A hemp smoker is happy to be in the company of another hemp smoker. He may even embrace him. When he sees other people, he hides his face from them. A cow licks the body of its own calf. The others, she pushes away with her horns." (All laugh.)

When the Pundit has left, Thakur laughs and says, "He has become 'diluted' in one day. Did you notice his humility**,** how he accepted everything?"

It is the 7th day of the bright fortnight in the month of Ashada. The rays of the moon fall onto the western verandah. Thakur is still sitting there. M. salutes him. Thakur asks affectionately, "Are you leaving?"

[1] Power of Brahman, personification of the Primal Energy

M. — Yes, sir, I would like to take your leave.

Sri Ramakrishna — I have been thinking that I would visit the homes of the devotees one by one. I shall visit your house one day. What do you say?

M. — That would be very nice, sir.

Section X

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar Temple with Devotees

Chapter I

Sannyasins should not hoard – Thakur is 'intoxicated with divine love, full to the brim'

Sri Ramakrishna is at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. He is sitting on the smaller cot in his room, facing east. Devotees are seated on the floor. It is 9 November 1884, 25th of Kartik, the 7th day of the dark fortnight.

It is about midday when M. arrives. He watches the other devotees gather. Vijaykrishna Goswami is accompanied by a number of Brahmo devotees. Ram Chakravarty, the priest, is also there. A little later Mahimacharan, Narayan, and Kishori arrive. They are followed by many other devotees.

It is early winter. Thakur had been in need of a shirt and had asked M. for one. M. has brought one shirt of broadcloth and another of a heavier cloth. Thakur had not asked him to bring the thicker shirt.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — You had better take that one back and wear it yourself. There is no harm in it. Tell me, what kind of shirt did I ask you to bring?

M. — You asked me to bring an ordinary shirt. You didn't ask me to bring the heavier one.

Sri Ramakrishna — Then please take it back.

(To Vijay and others) "You see, Dwarika Babu gave me a shawl. Later, some Hindustanis [from northwest India] also brought one. I could not accept it."

Thakur was going to say something more when Vijay began to talk.

Vijay — That is right, sir. One should only accept what is needed. And there must be a man to give it. Who but a man will give?

Sri Ramakrishna — It's only the Lord who gives. A mother-in-law said to her daughter-in-law, 'Oh, my child, everybody has an attendant to serve him. It would be nice if there were someone to massage your feet.' Her daughter-in-law answered, 'Lord Hari will massage my feet. I do not need anyone else.' She said this in a spirit of devotion and love for God.

"A fakir went to Emperor Akbar to ask him for money. The Emperor was offering prayers[1] saying, 'Oh Allah, give me wealth and riches.' Hearing this, the fakir started to leave, but the Emperor beckoned him to sit down. After he had finished his prayers, he asked the fakir why he had been going to leave. He replied, 'You were praying for wealth and riches. I thought that if I have to beg, why ask a beggar, why not Allah?' "

Vijay — I saw a sadhu in Gaya who never made any effort to obtain food for himself. One day he wanted to feed some devotees. Special wheat flour

[1] Namaz

and clarified butter arrived from somewhere. There were fruits and other foods, too.

Storing for future and three classes of holy men[1]

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vijay and others) — There are three classes of sadhus: superior, mediocre and inferior. The superior class makes no effort to obtain food. The mediocre and the inferior kinds of holy men – among them *dandis*[2] – beg for alms, saying, 'Namo Narayana,' and stand patiently waiting. The inferior sadhus kick up a row if they are not given alms. (All laugh.)

"The superior sadhu has the nature of a python. It does not move – it sits at one place and food comes to it. A young sadhu, who had been a brahmachari from boyhood, went to beg alms. A girl came up to give him some food. Seeing her prominent breasts, the sadhu thought she had abscesses on her chest. He asked about them. The ladies of the family explained to him that the Lord would provide milk through her breasts for an infant to be born to her. The Lord had provided for all this beforehand. Hearing this, the young sadhu was amazed. He said, 'So there is no need for me to beg for alms. I, too, will have food provided without asking.' "

Some devotees think to themselves, "It will be all right if we, too, make no effort."

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[1] Sadhus
[2] A sect of sannyasins who always carry a staff with them

Sri Ramakrishna — He who feels the need for effort will have to make it.

Vijay — There is a beautiful story in the Bhaktamala.

Sri Ramakrishna — Please tell it.

Vijay — Would you please tell it yourself?

Sri Ramakrishna — No, you should tell it. I don't remember it well. In the beginning, one should hear these things, so earlier I used to hear all this.

Thakur's state of mind – contemplation on Rama – signs of highest spiritual knowledge[1] and ecstatic love

Sri Ramakrishna — I am in a different state of mind now. Hanuman said, 'I don't know the lunar date, nor the position of the stars. I only contemplate Rama.'

"The chatak bird wants only pure water. It may be dying of thirst, but it must fly high in the sky and drink there. The Ganges, the Jamuna and the seven seas are all full of water, but it will not drink the water of the earth.

"Rama and Lakshmana visited Pampa lake. Lakshmana saw a crow trying again and again to drink water, but it did not actually drink. When asked about it, Rama said, 'Brother, this crow is a great devotee of God. It repeats the name of Rama night and day. It is dying of thirst, yet it is not

[1] Purna jnana

drinking because it thinks that if it drinks, its repetition of the Name will be interrupted. On a full moon night, I asked Haladhari, 'Brother, is it the night of the new moon?' (All laugh.)

(Smiling) "Yes, it is true. I had heard that a characteristic of perfect spiritual knowledge is that one does not distinguish the nights of the full moon[1] and the new moon[2]. How could Haladhari believe it? He said, 'This is the age of Kali. He cannot distinguish between the new moon and full moon. And people still respect him!' "

While Thakur is talking, Mahimacharan enters.

Sri Ramakrishna (respectfully) — Come in. Please come in. Take a seat.

(To Vijay and the other devotees) "In such a state of mind, one doesn't remember dates. The other day there was a religious festival at Beni Pal's garden. I forgot the date. I don't remember the last day of the month, when I am going to repeat the Lord's Name with great earnestness[3]. (After reflecting for a few minutes) But I do remember that a certain person is coming to see me."

Where does Sri Ramakrishna's mind dwell – God-realization and inspiration

"Such a state comes when one's mind is fixed one hundred percent on the Lord. Rama said to Hanuman, 'You have brought a report about Sita.

[1] Purnima
[2] Amavasya
[3] It is auspicious to repeat the Name of God on the last day of the month

How did you find her? Please tell me.' Hanuman said, 'Rama, I saw that it was only Sita's body lying there – no mind or soul in it. She has surrendered her whole mind and soul at your feet, so it was only her body lying there. The God of death[1] was hovering around, but he was helpless. It was just her body lying there; there was no mind or soul in it.'

"One acquires the nature of the ideal one meditates upon. By meditating on the Lord night and day, one attains His nature. A salt doll went to fathom the ocean; it became one with it.

"What is the purpose of studying holy books or scriptures? It is the realization of God. Somebody opened a sadhu's book to see what was in it. There was nothing written but the name of Rama – on every page. Nothing else.

"When one develops love for God, one feels spiritually inspired by small things. One reaps the fruit of millions of sandhyas[2], by just pronouncing the name of Rama once.

"A peacock is inspired to see clouds – it spreads its wings and dances full of joy. Radha also used to become inspired when she saw a cloud. The memory of Krishna would awaken in her mind.

"Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was passing close to the village of Mera. He heard that drums were made of the clay from that village. He was completely overwhelmed with divine emotion

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[1] *Kala*; Yama

[2] Worship and meditation performed at dawn, noon and sunset by orthodox Hindus

because drums are played at the time of the devotional singing of the Lord's name.

"Who gets such divine inspiration? One who is rid of worldly wisdom. When the sap of attachment is completely dried up, one attains the inspiration of God in no time. A wet match stick will not strike fire, even if you rub it a thousand times. But when it is dry, it at once strikes fire when rubbed just a little."

After God-realization, self-surrender comes, and a steady wisdom in sorrow and death

"The body, of course, is subject to happiness and sorrow. He who has realized God surrenders his mind, body, prana[1] and soul, all these, to Him. Before taking a dip in Pampa lake, Rama and Lakshmana thrust their bows into the earth near the lake. After his bath Lakshmana saw that his bow was smeared with blood. Seeing it, Rama said, 'Look, brother, some living being seems to have been injured.' Lakshmana dug in the earth and saw a big frog half dead. Full of compassion, Rama said, 'Why didn't you make a noise? We would have tried to save you! When a snake seizes you, you croak loudly!' The frog said, 'Rama, when I am seized by a snake, I croak loudly, 'Rama save me, save me! Oh Rama!' Now when I see that Rama himself is killing me, I don't say anything.' "

[1] Vital breath

Chapter II

How to remain in one's real Self? Why is the path of union with God through knowledge[1] difficult?

Thakur is silent for awhile and is looking at Mahima and the other devotees.

Thakur has heard that Mahimacharan does not believe in the idea of the guru, so he changes the topic of conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna — One should have faith in the words of the guru. There is no need to consider the guru's character. A saying goes, 'Though my guru visits a tavern, he is yet my ever blissful guru.'

"A person was reading the *Chandi Bhagavata*. He read, 'The broom is no doubt dirty, yet it cleans.' "

Mahimacharan often discusses the Vedanta. His goal is to attain the knowledge of Brahman. He follows the path of jnana, so he discriminates continuously.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima) — The goal of the jnani is to know the nature of his own real Self. This is jnana. And it is this that is also called liberation. One's own real Self is Parabrahman[2]. Parabrahman and 'I' are one. But one does not know this because of the veil of maya.

"I said to Harish, 'One does not have to do more than this: some basketfuls of earth are lying over gold; all you have to do is remove the earth. That is all.'

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[1] Jnana yoga
[2] The Supreme Brahman

"Devotees retain their I-consciousness, but not jnanis. The Naked One (Totapuri) used to teach how to live in one's own real Self: merge the mind in the intellect and the intellect in the Atman. Then you will be established in the real nature of the Atman.

"But one's 'I' continues to persist, it does not leave. For instance, think of a limitless sheet of water. There is water all around – above, below, in front, behind, right and left. Within this sheet of water is a pot full of water. Though there is water outside and inside, the pot still remains – one's 'I' is like this pot."

His earlier story – thunderbolt in the Kali Temple – body and character of the knower of Brahman

"A jnani's body does not undergo any change after attaining Knowledge. The fire of spiritual knowledge, however, does burn up enemies like lust and the other passions. Long ago a thunderbolt struck the Kali Temple in a rainstorm. I went out and saw that the doors were not affected, but the heads of the screws were broken. The body can be likened to the doors, and such attachments as lust to the screws.

"A jnani only likes spiritual talk. He is greatly troubled to hear about worldly things. A man of the world is in a different class. His turban of ignorance never disappears. He resumes the same worldly talk after having taken a detour for awhile.

"The *Vedas* talk of the seven spiritual planes. When the mind of the jnani rises to the fifth plane, he likes to hear nothing but talk on God. He cannot

talk of anything else – only words of knowledge come as instruction from his mouth."

Is Sri Ramakrishna describing his own state? He adds, "The *Vedas* talk of Sat-chit-ananda Brahman. That Brahman is neither one nor two. It is between one and two. One can neither say, 'It exists' nor 'It does not exist'. It is between 'existence' and 'non-existence'."

Sri Ramakrishna and union with God by the path of love and devotion[1] – loving devotion brings God-realization

Sri Ramakrishna — One attains God by developing an intense attachment[2], or by cultivating love for Him. Devotion acquired through ritualistic worship[3] goes as easily as it comes. What is ritualistic worship? It consists of repeating the Name so many times a day, meditating for a certain period of time, performing so many sacrifices[4] and homa for a certain duration, worshipping with so many articles, and repeating a certain mantra during puja – it is as easy to lose as to get. So many people say, 'Oh brother, I have eaten nothing but *havishya*[5] for so long; I have worshipped the Deity so many times at my home – but to what avail?'

"But intense devotion[6] is never lost. Who gains such passionate devotion? He who has performed

[1] Bhakti Yoga
[2] Raga Bhakti
[3] *Vaidhi bhakti*
[4] Yajna
[5] A holy food consisting of boiled rice with clarified butter
[6] Raga Bhakti

many austerities in an earlier life, or he who is ever-perfect[1]. It is like, while clearing weeds and rubbish in a dilapidated house, one comes across a fountain fitted with a pipe. It was lying covered by earth and red dust but as soon as they are removed, water begins to gush out.

"They who have intense devotion do not say, 'Brother, I have lived on *havishya* for so long, but what have I gained?' They who take up farming for the first time, give up their land if they fail to get a crop. But a hereditary farmer will persist in farming, whether there is a crop or not. Their ancestors have practiced farming, so they know that farming will bring them food.

"They who have intense devotion have real and sincere love for God. He takes their burden on Himself. When you are admitted to a hospital, the physician does not discharge you until you are cured.

"They who are held by the Lord need have no fear. A boy who holds his father's hand while walking on the balk of a field may fall if he loosens his grip for lack of caution. But if the father is holding the hand of his son, he does not fall."

One talks only of God when one develops loving devotion – renunciation of the world and living as a householder

"What is not possible when one has faith in God? He who has genuine faith believes in God with form and the Formless One – Rama, Krishna, and

[1] *Nityasiddha*

Bhagavati (Mother of the Universe) – in all of them.

"When I was going to my village (Kamarpukur), a hailstorm began. There was also the danger of dacoits lurking in the fields. I began to utter the names of all the deities: Rama, Krishna and Bhagavati. And then I called out, 'Hanuman!' I called out the names of all the gods and goddesses. What does that mean?

"Do you know what it is like? When a servant or a maid goes to the market to buy supplies, he counts money taken from the master, saying, 'Here is money for potatoes, here is money for brinjals and this money is for fish.' The money for all the articles is taken separately – and then mixed up.

"When one develops love for God, one likes to talk only of Him. One begins to speak and to hear only of one's beloved.

"A worldly person's mouth begins to water if somebody praises his son. The father immediately says, 'I say, bring some water for your uncle to wash his feet.'

"They who like guavas are very happy to hear good things about them. If, however, someone talks disparagingly of them, he might suddenly say, 'Oh! Has anybody in your fourteen ancestral generations ever grown guavas?' "

Thakur is saying the following to Mahimacharan since the latter is a householder.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima) — Why renounce the world altogether? It is enough if one gets rid of

attachment. But you need to practice spiritual disciplines. You have to fight with your senses.

"Besides, it is more convenient to fight a battle from within the fort. One receives a lot of help from the fort. The world is a place for enjoyment. One should enjoy it, and then quickly give up one article of enjoyment after the other. Once I had a desire to wear a golden chain around my waist. I even got one and put it on – but I took it off immediately.

"I ate some onion and began to discriminate in this way – my mind, this is what is called onion. I moved it around in my mouth for awhile, first on one side and then on the other. I spat it out after making it touch the mouth on all sides."

Chapter III

In the joy of devotional songs

A musician is coming today for community singing of hymns[1].

Thakur asks the devotees every now and then, "Where is the musician?"

Mahima — We are quite all right as we are.

Sri Ramakrishna — But why, my dear sir? We get this all year long.

Somebody from outside the room says, "The singing party has come! The musician has arrived!"

[1] Kirtan

Full of joy, Sri Ramakrishna asks, "Where is he?"

A mat is spread on the long southeastern verandah of the room. Sri Ramakrishna says, "Sprinkle a little Ganges water. So many worldly people have walked this verandah."

The wife and daughters of Pyari Babu, a resident of Bali, arrive after visiting the Kali Temple. They wish to hear the kirtan when they see the preparations being made for it. Someone says to Thakur, "They are asking if there is enough space for them in the room. Can they sit here?" Listening to the devotional songs, Thakur says, "No, no." He means that there is not enough room.

Just at this moment Narayan arrives. He salutes Thakur.

Thakur says to him, "Why have you come? You had such a beating from the members of your family." Narayan goes toward Thakur's room. Seeing this, Thakur beckons Baburam to give him something to eat.

Narayan enters the room. Suddenly Thakur rises and follows. He wants to feed Narayan with his own hands. After doing so, he comes back and sits on the verandah where the devotional songs are being sung.

Chapter IV

Thakur enjoys devotional songs in the company of devotees

A number of devotees have arrived: Vijay Goswami, Mahimacharan, Narayan, Adhar, M., the Younger Gopal, and some others. Rakhal and Balaram are still in holy Vrindavan.

It is between three and four o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna is listening to the songs on the verandah. Narayan comes and sits close to him. Other devotees surround them.

At this moment Adhar enters. Thakur seems excited to see him. When Adhar sits down, after having paid his obeisance, Thakur beckons him to come nearer.

The musicians finish singing and the session comes to a close. The devotees stroll in the garden. Some of them go toward the temples of Mother Kali and Radhakanta to see the evening services[1].

When evening worship is over, the devotees return to Thakur's room.

They again arrange for the singing of hymns in Thakur's room. Thakur is full of enthusiasm. He says, "Bring a lamp." Two lamps light the room brightly.

Thakur says to Vijay, "Why are you sitting there? Move over here."

The tempo of the kirtan rises in crescendo. Thakur becomes intoxicated and begins to dance. The devotees surround him and also dance. Vijay's cloth drops off while he is dancing. He is not conscious of it.

When the song ends, Vijay looks for his key, which he had dropped somewhere. Thakur says, "A special divine sound resounds here." Saying this, he laughs and then says to Vijay, "Why bother about it?" (In other words, Vijay has nothing to do with keys anymore.)

Kishori salutes Thakur and takes his leave. Thakur, full of affection for him, touches his chest with his hand and says, "Do come again." His words are full of tenderness. After awhile Mani and Gopal come and salute him – they are also preparing to leave. Thakur speaks to them with the same

[1] Arati

affection, as if his words were dripping honey. He says, "Leave tomorrow morning. You may catch cold at night."

In the company of devotees

Mani and Gopal do not leave, but decide to stay the night. They sit on the floor with a couple of other devotees. After awhile, Sri Ramakrishna says to Ram Chakravarty, "Ram, where is the other foot mat that was here?"

Thakur has not had time to rest the whole day. Where could he go, leaving the devotees behind? Now he goes out for awhile. Returning to his room, he sees Mani writing down the words of a song being spoken by Ramlal.

Redeem me, O Redeeming Mother!

I am so afraid of Yama, the god of death.

Thakur asks Mani what he is writing. Being told that it is a particular song, he says, "This is a very long song."

Thakur takes a little farina pudding with one or two *luchis*[1] at night. He asks Ramlal, "Do you have any more farina pudding?"

Having written a line or two, Mani does not write any more of the words of the song.

Thakur, sitting on a small carpet on the floor, eats the pudding.

Then he returns to the smaller cot and sits there, while M. sits down on the foot mat lying near the cot and talks to him. When he talks about Narayan, Thakur becomes absorbed in divine emotion.

[1] Fried bread

Sri Ramakrishna — Did you see Narayan today?

M. — Yes sir. His eyes were full of tears. I felt like weeping when I saw his face.

Sri Ramakrishna — I feel the love a parent feels for his child[1] when I see him. They thrash him at home for coming here. He has nobody to defend him. [A song goes –]

> O Kubja[2], there is none who can make you understand.
>
> There is nobody to defend Radha.

M. (smiling) — The other day he left his books at Haripada's house and came here.

Sri Ramakrishna — It was not right for him to do that.

Thakur is silent. After awhile he talks again.

Sri Ramakrishna — You see, he has much substance in him. Otherwise, how could I have been drawn to him even though I was listening to the singing of hymns? I left the devotional singing to come to the room to see him – such a thing has never happened before.

Thakur is silent. After awhile he speaks again.

Sri Ramakrishna — In a state of ecstasy, I asked him how he was. He just said, 'I am very happy.'

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[1] *Vatsalya*
[2] The hunchback woman

(To M.) Buy something for him to eat from time to time – feed him lovingly, as a son.

Sri Ramakrishna now talks about Tejchandra.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Ask him what he thinks of me – does he think of me as a jnani? I heard that Tejchandra is very reserved. (To Gopal) Look, tell Tejchandra to come here on Saturdays and Tuesdays.

Thakur is sitting on the floor, eating farina pudding. A lamp is burning on a lamp-stand close to him. M. is sitting close by. Thakur says, "Are there any sweets?" M. had brought sandesh made of fresh raw sugar. He says to Ramlal, "Some sandesh is lying on the shelf."

Sri Ramakrishna — Where is the sandesh? Bring it here.

M. looks on the shelf for the sandesh, rather confused. He does not find it there. It all seems to have been served to the devotees. Embarrassed, he comes back and sits again near Thakur. Thakur speaks.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, I may visit your school once.

M. guesses that Thakur wants to visit the school to see Narayan. So, he says, "It would be all right for you to visit our home."

Sri Ramakrishna — No, I am thinking of something else. Do you know what? I want to see if there are other worthy boys in your school.

M. — You must certainly visit the school. Others visit, so you can also visit the school.

Having finished his meal, Thakur sits on the smaller cot. A devotee prepares a smoke for him. Thakur smokes. In the meantime M. and Gopal, still on the verandah, eat chapattis, lentils and other refreshments. They decide to sleep in the nahabat.

After the meal M. sits on the foot mat near the cot.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — If there are pots and pans in the nahabat, you may sleep in this room.

M. — Very well, sir.

Chapter V

With the attendant

It is ten or eleven at night. Thakur is resting on the smaller cot, leaning against a pillow. Mani is sitting on the floor while Thakur talks to him. A lamp is burning near the wall of the room on the lamp-stand mentioned before.

Thakur is the ocean of motiveless grace. He allows Mani to serve him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Look, my feet are aching. Can you massage them a little?

Mani sits next to Thakur's feet on the smaller cot and, taking his two feet on his lap, strokes them gently. Thakur talks to him every now and then.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — How did you like the conversation today?

Mani — Sir, it was very good.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Did you like the story about Emperor Akbar?

Mani — Yes, sir. It was very good.

Sri Ramakrishna — Tell me what you liked about it.

Mani — A fakir went to see Emperor Akbar while Akbar was offering Namaz. In his prayers he was asking the Lord for wealth and riches. Hearing this, the fakir tried to leave the room quietly. When asked by Akbar why he was leaving, he said, 'If I have to beg, why should I beg of a beggar?'

Sri Ramakrishna — And what else did we talk about?

Mani — We talked a lot about saving for the future.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did we say about saving for the future?

Mani — As long as one feels he should make an effort, he should make the effort. How nicely you told us about hoarding in Sinti!

Sri Ramakrishna — Tell me about it.

Mani — God takes upon himself the burden of one who depends on Him – like a guardian taking the whole burden of a minor. And this we heard: a young boy cannot find for himself a place to sit at a feast. Somebody else shows him a seat to partake of the feast.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, that isn't correct. When a father holds the hand of his son and leads him, the son does not fall.

Mani — And today you talked of three types of sadhus. A superior sadhu is one who does not move about seeking his food. You also talked of a young sadhu who, when he saw the breasts of a girl, said, 'Why does she have sores on her chest?' You also said many other wonderful things – these were the last things you talked about.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What were they?

Mani — One was the fable of the crow of Pampa lake. It repeated the name of Rama night and day, so when it went to the lake to quench its thirst, it couldn't drink the water. And about the book of a particular sadhu – only 'Om, Rama' was written on every page of the book. And also what Hanuman said to Rama.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did he say?

Mani — He said that he had come there after seeing Sita. But only her body was lying there; her

mind and soul were both surrendered at Rama's feet.

"And you also told the story of the chatak bird. It does not drink any water but pure water [of rain that falls at a particular conjunction of stars].

"And about Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga."

Sri Ramakrishna — What was that?

Mani — As long as one is conscious of 'the pot,' the idea that 'I am a pot' persists. As long as one is conscious of one's 'I,' one cherishes the idea, 'I am a devotee, You are Bhagavan.'

Sri Ramakrishna — No. Whether you are conscious of 'the pot' or not, 'the pot' continues to exist. The 'I' doesn't leave you. Reason it out a thousand times, one's 'ego' does not vanish.

Mani is silent for awhile. He again talks.

Mani — You had a conversation with Ishan Mukherji in the Kali Temple. I was very fortunate to be present to hear it.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Yes. Let me hear what we talked about.

Mani — You said that work is only the first chapter of human life. You asked Sambhu Mallick, 'Suppose the Lord appears before you, will you ask Him to provide hospitals and dispensaries?'

"And you said something else that was special – God doesn't reveal Himself as long as one is attached to work. You said this to Keshab Sen."

Sri Ramakrishna — What?

Mani — As long as a child sucks on a pacifier, forgetful of its mother, the latter finishes her cooking. But when the child throws the pacifier away and begins to cry, the mother takes the rice pot off the fire and goes to the child.

"And you talked about something else, too, that day. Lakshmana asked, 'Where can one see God?' After explaining in many ways, Rama said, 'Brother, when you see burning love and devotion[1] in a man – when he laughs, cries, dances and sings, intoxicated with ecstatic love – know that I dwell there.' "

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah! How beautiful!

Thakur is silent for awhile.

Mani — You talked to Ishan only about turning away from worldliness. Since then many people have gained some awareness and are inclined to reduce their duties. You said, 'Ravana died in Lanka while Behula cried her heart out[2].'

Thakur laughs loudly.

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[1] *Urjita bhakti*

[2] Behula was unrelated to Ravana and lived many years later. This saying shows how man gives way to totally irrelevant matters.

Mani (very humbly) — Well, sir, isn't it right to reduce one's duties and the hustle and bustle of life?

Sri Ramakrishna — But it is a different matter if you come across a sadhu or a poor man. You must serve him.

Mani — And that day you spoke rightly to Ishan about his flatterers – that they are like vultures falling on a carcass. You once said this to Pundit Padmalochan too.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, I said this to Vamandas of Ulo.

After awhile, Mani sits on the foot mat near the smaller cot.

Thakur feels sleepy. He says to Mani, "You may go and rest now. Where is Gopal? Please shut the door."

The next day is Monday. Sri Ramakrishna has left his bed very early in the morning to chant the holy names of the deities. Now and then he glances at the Ganges. The morning arati is being performed in the temples of Kali and Radhakanta. Mani has slept on the floor in Thakur's room. He, too, has left his bed to watch and hear the worships.

After his morning oblutions, he comes and sits near Thakur.

Thakur has finished his bath. He goes to the Kali Temple with Mani. Thakur asks him to lock the door of his room.

Reaching the Kali Temple, Thakur takes a seat. He offers flowers, sometimes on his own head, sometimes at the lotus feet of Mother Kali. He fans

the Mother with the *chamara*[1]. Then he returns to his room and asks Mani to unlock the door. He enters the room and sits down on the smaller cot. He is absorbed in divine ecstasy and repeats the holy name of the deity. Mani sits alone on the floor.

Now Thakur begins to sing. Intoxicated with divine emotion, is he trying to teach Mani, through the song, that Kali is none other than Brahman? And that Kali is both with attributes and without attributes? And She is without form and She is also with infinite forms?

Song – Is there anybody who knows Kali, She who is the consort of *Kala*[2]? Even the six schools of philosophy do not reveal Her[3].

Song – All this is the sport of my mad Mother (whose maya[4] has deluded the three worlds). All this is the infallible secret play of that lady[5].

Song — O Kali, who can know You? You have infinite forms.

You are Supreme Knowledge, You are timeless and primeval; You are the breaker of the bonds of the world.

You are Shiva's consort. You enthrall the mind of Govinda. You are the bestower of divine knowledge and of salvation. You fulfill the desires of the mind.

You are Sri Radha who resides in the heart of Sri Krishna. You are the daughter of the mountains. O Sarada, grant us a boon.

Song – O Mother, the Redeemer, take me across quickly this time.

---

[1] A fan made of the white hair from the tail of the chamari yak, used in Hindu ritual worship
[2] The Spirit of Eternity
[3] For complete song, see Section I, Chapter V of this volume
[4] Nescience
[5] For complete song, see Section XX, Chapter II of Volume II

I am dying in fear of the God of Death[1].

O, Mother of the Universe, preserver and enchantress of the world, and its begetter.

You took birth from Yashoda's womb and participated in the Lord's divine sport.

As Radha You sported and enjoyed Yourself in Vrindavan with Krishna, the beloved of Vraja.

Full of sweetness, You took delight in the rasa and participated in the divine sport.

You are Shiva's consort; You are the Mother, the heartthrob of Govinda. You dwell in the heart and give spiritual salvation.

You are eternal. You are Ishani, ever full of bliss; You assume all forms; You have attributes and yet You are attributeless. You are ever the beloved of Shiva. Who can know Your greatness?

Mani thinks to himself: If Thakur would only sing this song –

O Mother, I have seen Your crimson feet.

I shall now never forget You, even though You may try to trick me.

How wonderful! As soon as the idea of the song comes to M.'s mind, Thakur sings it. After some time Thakur asks M., "Well, what do you think of my present state of mind?"

Mani (smiling) — You are in your natural and simple state[2] of mind.

Thakur sings the refrain of a song –

Till one is simple at heart, one cannot reach God, the Simple One.

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[1] Yama
[2] Sahaja

Section XI

Sri Ramakrishna Attends a Play about Prahlada's Life

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi

Today Sri Ramakrishna has come to the Star Theatre to see a play about Prahlada's life. He is accompanied by M., Baburam, Narayan and others. The Star Theatre is on Beadon Street. (Later, the Emerald Theatre and Classic Theatre were performed on this stage.)

It is Sunday, 14 December 1884, the 30th of Agrahayana, the 12th day of the dark fortnight. Sri Ramakrishna is seated in a box facing north. The theatre is brightly lit. M., Baburam and Narayan are sitting close to Sri Ramakrishna. Girish has just come to the box. The play has not yet begun. Thakur speaks to Girish.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Ah! You write very good plays!

Girish — But sir, I have not internalized them. I have just written them.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, you have internalized them. The other day I told you that no one can sketch a divine character without love and devotion for God in his heart.

"Assimilation of spiritual truths is a must. I went to see the play '*Nava Vrindavan*' at Keshab's

house. A Deputy Magistrate who earned eight hundred rupees a month was present. Everybody said, 'He is well versed in the scriptures.' But he was extremely busy with his son – he was very anxious that the boy have a good seat and a nice view of the stage. He did not pay any attention to the spiritual talk that was going on. The son kept asking him questions: 'Father, What is this? What is that?' He was very restless because of the boy. He had only read books; he had not internalized their ideas."

Girish — At times I ask myself, 'Why should I engage myself with the theatre and its activities any more?'

Sri Ramakrishna — No, you must continue. Mankind will learn from your plays.

> The play starts. Prahlada has come to school to learn to read and write. At the sight of Prahlada, Thakur affectionately says, "Prahlada, oh, Prahlada!" And he immediately goes into samadhi.
>
> Thakur begins to weep when he sees Prahlada under the feet of an elephant. He again weeps when he sees Prahlada thrown into a furnace.
>
> Lakshmi and Narayana are seated in Goloka[1]. Narayana is worried about Prahlada. Watching this scene, Thakur again goes into samadhi.

[1] The heavenly abode of Vishnu

Chapter II

Talk on spiritual matters with the devotees

Signs of God-realization and the way to know God – three classes of devotees

After the play is over, Thakur is taken to Girish's private room in the theatre. Girish asks him, "Would you care to see the play 'Confusion in Marriage'?" Thakur says, "No, why see that after Prahlada's life? I once said to a troupe of actors from Orissa, 'End a performance with religious talk.' It was so nice to hear about God. That it should be followed by 'Confusion in Marriage!' Such a worldly topic! It would take us back to where we started – we would return to our original attitude in the end."

Thakur is talking of God with Girish and other devotees. Girish asks him, "Sir, how did you like the play?"

Sri Ramakrishna — I saw that He Himself had become all of it. I saw the actors in the play as the very presence of the All-Blissful Mother. I saw the actors playing the parts of the cowherds in Goloka as the manifestation of Narayana Himself. He Himself had become all. But whether or not one has genuinely seen God is indicated by certain signs. One such sign is that one is in bliss – he shows no hesitancy. Such a person is like an ocean that has waves on its surface, but deep, still waters below. He who has attained the vision of God acts sometimes like a mad man and sometimes like an unclean spirit[1]. He doesn't distinguish between purity and impurity. Sometimes he acts like an

[1] *Pisacha*

inert object, for he becomes speechless when he sees God both within and without. Sometimes he is like a child wandering around freely with no attachment, [naked] with his cloth under his arm. He sometimes frolics like a boy, at other times he conducts himself as a young man, working or teaching mankind with the strength of a lion.

"An embodied being[1] cannot see the Lord because of his ego. When the sky is overcast, one cannot see the sun. But because one cannot see the sun does not mean that there is no sun. The sun certainly exists.

"But there is no harm in the ego of a child; on the contrary, it is beneficial. If you eat spinach greens you may fall ill, but hinche[2] leaves are good for the health. So hinche should not be considered in the same category as spinach greens. Sugar candy, similarly, should not to be thought of as an ordinary sweet. Sweets bring indigestion, but sugar candy does not produce phlegm.

"That is why I said to Keshab Sen, 'If I tell you more than I have already said, you will not be able to hold your organization together.' Keshab was frightened. Then I said to him, 'There is no harm in the 'ego of a child,' or the 'ego of a servant'.'

"Those who have realized God see that it is God who has become the universe and its living beings. He has become all. They are superior devotees."

---

[1] Jiva
[2] A kind of aquatic plant eaten as leaves

Girish (smiling) — God has become all – but a little ego persists that is not harmful.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Right, there is no harm in it. This little bit of ego exists to enjoy God. It is only when there is the distinction between me and you that one can enjoy – like in the attitude of the Master and the servant.

"And then there are mediocre devotees. They see that God exists in everyone as the Inner Controller[1]. The devotee of the lowest class says, 'God exists. He dwells there, beyond, in the sky.' (All laugh.)

"When I saw the cowherd boys in Goloka, I felt that God had become everything. He who has seen Him knows truly that God Himself is the doer, that He indeed does everything."

Girish — Sir, I have understood that well, that it is indeed God who does everything.

Sri Ramakrishna — I say, 'Mother, I am an instrument and You are the Being who uses the instrument. I am inert and You make me conscious. I act as You make me act. I speak as You make me speak.' The ignorant man says, 'I am responsible for doing some actions and God is responsible for others.' "

[1] *Antaryami*

Karma Yoga purifies one's mind-stuff[1] – why harp on sin? *Ahetuki*[2] devotion

Girish — Sir, since I am not really doing anything (it is God who works), why should I work at all?

Sri Ramakrishna — No, my dear, work is good. If you have prepared the soil, it will grow whatever you sow in it. But work must be performed without any expectation of reward[3].

"There are two kinds of paramahamsas: one follows the path of jnana, the other follows the path of intense love for God[4]. Jnanis are self-seeking – their goal is their own realization. The paramahamsa who follows the path of love, like Shukadeva, first attains God and then teaches mankind. There are some who wipe their mouths after eating a mango, and then there are those who share it with others. There are people who bring baskets and spades to dig a shallow well, and when they have dug it, they throw the spades and baskets in the well. There are others who save their baskets and spades so that others of the community may use them. Shukadeva and others like him preserve their 'baskets and spades' for the use of others. (To Girish) You must keep them for the use of others."

Girish — Please bless me, sir.

---

[1] Chitta
[2] Love for God that wells up unbidden out of the depths of the immortal soul
[3] *Nishkama* karma
[4] Prema

Sri Ramakrishna — Have faith in the name of the Divine Mother and you will attain everything.

Girish — But I am a sinner.

Sri Ramakrishna — The rascal who repeats, 'Sin, sin,' becomes a sinner.

Girish — Sir, the spot where I sit becomes impure.

Sri Ramakrishna — What do you mean? If a light is brought into a room that has been dark for a thousand years, does it take long to light the room? Is it not illuminated immediately?

Girish — You have blessed me.

Sri Ramakrishna — If you believe it sincerely. What more can I say? As for me, I merely eat, drink and repeat the Divine Mother's name.

Girish — I am not so sincere. Please give me sincerity.

Sri Ramakrishna — Who am I? Had there been Narada or Shukadeva...

Girish — I cannot see Narada before me. What I receive comes directly from you.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Well, you have faith!

Everyone remains silent for awhile. Now they begin to talk again.

Girish — I have only one special desire: spontaneous love for God[1].

Sri Ramakrishna — Only Ishvarakotis have such love. It is not for ordinary men.

Everyone sits silently. Thakur begins to sing absent-mindedly. His gaze is turned upward.

Does everyone attain the treasure of Shyama? Does everyone get the treasure of Kali?

The ignorant mind does not know what She is.

Even Shiva with all his austerities cannot fix his mind on Her crimson feet.

The riches and wealth of Indra and the other gods is a trifle compared to Her love.

If Mother Shyama turns to one and casts Her glance, one lives in eternal Bliss.

The kings of yogis, the best of munis, and Indra are unable to meditate on Her feet.

But the worthless Kamalakanta still yearns for Her feet.

Girish — But the worthless Kamalakanta still yearns for Her feet.

Chapter III

The way to realize God – yearn for Him

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish) — One attains God when one has developed intense dispassion[2]. One's heart and soul must yearn for Him. A disciple

[1] *Ahetuki bhakti*
[2] Vairagya

asked his guru how he could attain God. The guru told him to come with him. He took him to a pond and held him under water. After awhile he released him and asked, 'How did you feel under water?' The disciple answered, 'I was panting for breath – as though I were going to die!' The guru said, 'Now listen, you will attain God when your heart and soul are just as restless for Him.'

"So I say that God can be attained when one combines the force of these three attractions: the worldly man's attraction for his possessions, the chaste wife's attraction for her husband, and the attraction of a mother for her child. One immediately attains the vision of God when one loves Him with the combined force of these three attractions.

> Call on Mother Shyama, O my mind, with a real cry!
>
> I shall see then that She will not hold Herself from me.

"God will certainly grant His vision if you call on Him with real longing."

Harmony of Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga – bhakti according to Narada enjoined for the age of Kali

"The other day I told you the meaning of bhakti – to worship God with your body, mind and speech. 'With the body' means to worship and serve Him with your hands, to go to His shrine with your feet, to hear the chanting of His name and glories with your ears, and to see His image with your eyes. 'With the mind' means to contemplate and meditate on Him constantly, and to remember and think

about His divine sport. 'With speech' means to sing hymns and chant His name and glories.

"Bhakti, according to Narada, is suited for the age of Kali: One must constantly chant His name and glories. Those who have no time should single-mindedly chant His name morning and evening, repeating, 'Haribol[1], Haribol,' while clapping their hands.

"There is no pride in the ego of devotion[2]. It does not create ignorance; on the contrary, it helps one to realize God. This ego is not to be counted as an ordinary ego – just as hinche greens are not ordinary greens, which make you ill. By eating hinche leaves, one is cured of an excess of bile[3] – it does one good. Sugar candy is not like ordinary sweets. Sweets are generally harmful, but sugar candy removes acidity.

"Single-minded devotion[4] leads to love for God. When love for God matures, one goes into bhava[5]. When it becomes intense, one goes into Mahabhava[6]. And lastly one develops prema[7].

"Prema is a cord which ties one to the Lord – He cannot escape when one develops prema. An ordinary man can only attain bhava. Only an *Ishvarakoti* can have Mahabhava and prema. Chaitanyadeva attained it.

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[1] A Vaishnava expression meaning "Chant the Lord's name"
[2] Bhakti
[3] One of the humours of the body, namely pitta
[4] Nishtha bhakti
[5] Ecstasy
[6] Highest manifestation of divine love
[7] A state in which the devotee forgets the world and his own body

"What is Jnana Yoga? It is the path by which one realizes the nature of one's own real Self – the awareness that Brahman is one's own real Self.

"Prahlada would sometimes be aware of his identity with Brahman; at other times, he would see God as one Being and himself as another – in the latter state he would remain in a mood of love and devotion for God.

"Hanuman said, 'O Rama, sometimes I see that You are the whole and I a part of You. At other times I see that You are the Lord and I am Your servant. But Rama, when I attain the knowledge of Reality[1], I perceive that You are indeed I and I am You.' "

Girish — Ah!

Can one attain God even in family life?

Sri Ramakrishna — Why can't one attain God in family life! But one must develop discrimination[2] and non-attachment[3]. The Lord is the Reality and all else is ephemeral – for two days only. This idea must become firmly established in the mind. Swimming on the surface will not do. One must dive deep.

Saying this, Thakur sings –

Dive deep, dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the sea of Beauty.

Search the deepest regions in the sea;

[1] Tattvajnana
[2] Viveka
[3] Vairagya

> There you will find the jewel, the wealth of prema (intense love of God).
>
> Within your heart is Vrindavan, the abode of God who is love.
>
> Search and look; search and look; search and look. You will find it.
>
> Then shall burn without ceasing the lamp of divine wisdom.
>
> Who is that Being who steers the boat on land – on land, on solid ground?
>
> Kabir says, 'Listen, listen, listen! Meditate on the hallowed feet of the Guru (Divine preceptor).'

"And then one must remember this – there is the danger of the crocodiles of lust and the other passions."

Girish — But I am not afraid of Yama, the god of death.

Sri Ramakrishna — No, but there is the danger of crocodiles – of lust and the rest. That is why one must first rub one's body with turmeric and then dive – that turmeric is discrimination and non-attachment.

"Only a few attain the knowledge of God[1] in family life. Two kinds of yogis are mentioned: the hidden yogi and the visible yogi. Those who have renounced the world are visible yogis; everyone can recognize them. The hidden yogi cannot be recognized. For example, a maidservant attends to all the work at her master's house, but her mind

[1] Jnana

remains on her children at home. And then as I told you, a woman of easy virtue attends to all her household chores with great enthusiasm – but her mind remains attached to her paramour. It is very difficult to cultivate discrimination and non-attachment. One cannot easily get rid of the feeling 'I am the doer and all these belong to me'. I saw a Deputy Magistrate who earned a salary of eight hundred rupees a month. A religious discourse was being conducted, but he did not pay the least attention to it. He had brought his son with him and was busy the entire time arranging a good seat for him. And I know another man, I shall not name him, who used to repeat the name of God diligently, but gave false evidence for ten thousand rupees. That is why I say that it is possible to attain God even in the world – but only if you cultivate discrimination and non-attachment."

Sinners and afflicted, and Sri Ramakrishna

Girish — What will happen to this sinner [meaning himself]?

Thakur fixes his gaze upward and begins to sing this tune in a touching manner –

O my mind! Contemplate Krishna**,** who gives beauty to man.

You will completely get rid of the fear of Yama.

By contemplating Him, all anxieties and worries of the world vanish.

They who meditate on Tribhanga (the thrice-bent one, Krishna) cross the waves of the world in the twinkling of an eye.

Why have you come to this earth, O my mind?

> What will you gain by infusing bad inclinations and defiling your heart?
>
> Says Dasharathi, it is not right that He will drown you.
>
> He who unites his heart with His attains the eternal feet of the Lord.

(To Girish) — 'Cross the waves of the world in the twinkling of an eye.'

Worship of Mahamaya, the Primordial Power, and the power of attorney

"One attains the vision of God only when Mahamaya[1] steps aside from the door. What you need is the grace of Mahamaya. That is why God's Power[2] is worshipped. You see, God is so very near, and yet one does not know Him because Mahamaya stands between. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana were walking along [in the forest during their exile]. Rama was leading, Sita was in the middle and Lakshmana was behind her. Rama was only two and a half cubits away, yet Lakshmana could not see him.

"One must cherish a particular attitude toward God while worshipping Him. I have three attitudes: the attitude of a child, the attitude of a maidservant, and the attitude of a female lover of the Lord[3]. I had the attitude of a maidservant and of a female companion for a long time. I used to dress myself like a woman in a sari and scarf, and I

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[1] The Great Power of illusion, or nescience
[2] Shakti
[3] Sakhi bhava

used to put on jewelry. The attitude of a child is very good.

"The 'heroic' attitude (of a lover) is not good. The shaven-headed Vaishnava monks and nuns[1], and couples in Tantrik worship[2] practice the 'heroic' attitude – in other words, the male aspirant looks upon the female as Prakriti, and tries to please her through intercourse with her. This kind of attitude often brings a downfall."

Girish — I had the same attitude once.

Thakur is worried and looks seriously at Girish.

Girish — This is my little obstacle. Please tell me what to do.

Sri Ramakrishna (after thinking for awhile) — Give God your general power of attorney. Let Him do what He wills.

Chapter IV

God-realization comes after developing sattva guna – Sat-chit-ananda[3] or bliss of divine inebriation[4]

Sri Ramakrishna is talking about the young boy devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish and others) — In meditation I saw the traits of the young devotees.

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[1] *Nedas* and *nedis*
[2] Bhairavas and Bhairavis
[3] Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute
[4] *Karanananda*

They have no thought of owning a house; they have no desire to enjoy female companionship. Even those who are married don't sleep with their wives. Do you know what that means? Unless one is rid of rajas and attains pure sattva, the mind does not become fixed on God. And one does not feel love for Him. Nor can one realize Him.

Girish — You have blessed me.

Sri Ramakrishna — How is that? I only said that you would succeed if you were sincere.

While talking, Thakur exclaims, "Anandamayi[1]! Anandamayi!" and passes into samadhi. He remains in that state for a long time. Returning to a somewhat normal state of consciousness, he says, "Where are those rascals?" M. calls Baburam to him.

Glancing at Baburam and the other devotees, Thakur becomes intoxicated with ecstatic love and says, "The bliss of Sat-chit-ananda is indeed good, but what about the bliss of divine inebriation?" Saying this, he begins to sing –

This time I have given my full attention.

I have learned divine fervour[2] from one well-versed in it.

O Mother, I have found a man from the country which has no night.

And now I can no longer distinguish day and night.

I have rendered barren all ritualistic devotions.

My sleep is broken. Why should I sleep anymore?

I am awake in the sacrifice of yoga.

[1] All-Blissful Divine Mother
[2] Bhava

Having received the sleep of yoga from You, I have put sleep to sleep.

I have given myself permanent colour with the help of borax and sulphur[1].

Both eyes brush the floor of the temple of my mind.

Says Ramprasad: Knowing the truth that Kali is the Supreme Brahman,

I bowed before both bhakti and salvation, and gave up all ideas of what is righteousness[2] and what is unrighteousness[3].

Thakur sings another song –

What need is there of going to the Ganges, Prabhas, Kashi and Kanchi if the lips can utter 'Kali, Kali' when my life ebbs away?

He who utters Kali in all the three sandhyas[4] needs no daily ritualistic worship.

Worship itself follows his footsteps but can never overtake him.

Charity, kindness and vows no longer appeal to him.

For Madan, the poet, all worship means the red feet of the Blissful Mother.

Who can know the qualities of the holy name of Kali,

The praises of which are sung by the God of gods, Mahadeva Himself?

"While praying to the Divine Mother, I used to say to Her, 'Mother, I want nothing else. Pray grant me pure love and devotion[5].' "

---

[1] Borax and sulphur render paint permanent
[2] Dharma
[3] Adharma
[4] At dawn, noon and twilight hour
[5] Bhakti

Thakur is happy to see Girish in a calm mood. He says to him, "This mood of yours is very good. Such a simple and natural[1] mood is best."

Thakur is seated in the room of the manager of the theatre. Somebody enters and asks him, "Would you like to see the play 'Confusion in Marriage'? The play is beginning now."

Thakur says to Girish, "What have you done? Why did you stage a play 'Confusion in Marriage' after 'Life of Prahlada'? It is like serving a bitter vegetable dish[2] after serving cheese pudding."

Sri Ramakrishna, the ocean of motiveless grace, and women of easy virtue

At the end of the play, Girish instructs the actresses to come and salute Thakur. They all prostrate before him. Some devotees stand nearby, others are sitting as they watch. They are amazed that some of the actresses touch Thakur's feet. When they do, Thakur says, full of tenderness, "Mother, please stop. Please don't do that, Mother."

When they have saluted him and left, Thakur says to the devotees, "All indeed are God in different forms."

Now Thakur gets into the carriage. Girish and other devotees accompany him and help him sit down.

While getting in, Thakur becomes absorbed in deep samadhi.

Narayan and some other devotees also get into the carriage. It leaves for Dakshineswar.

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[1] Sahaja

[2] Prepared with bitter gourd and other vegetables without adding spices and served in Bengal prior to meals

Section XII

Sri Ramakrishna with the Devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar with devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is happy in the company of the devotees. Baburam, the Younger Naren, Paltu, Haripada and a few others are seated on the floor. A young brahmin who has been staying with Sri Ramakrishna for two or three days is also there. It is Saturday, 7 March 1885, 25th day of Phalgun; the time is about 3 o' clock. It is the 7th day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra

The Holy Mother is living in the nahabat these days. Occasionally she comes to Sri Ramakrishna's room to serve him. Mohini Mohan has arrived by hired carriage with his wife and Navin Babu's mother.

The ladies have gone to the nahabat to have the darshan of the Holy Mother and salute her. They have stayed there. They will pay their obeisance to Sri Ramakrishna when the male devotees have gone. Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot. As he looks at the young devotees, his face beams with joy.

Rakhal is not living in Dakshineswar at the present time. He had been in Vrindaban with Balaram for some months. Since his return, he lived at home.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Rakhal is on 'pension' these days. Since his return from

Vrindaban, he has been staying at home. His wife is there. But he says, 'I will not take a job, even if I am paid a thousand rupees a month.'

"One day when he was resting here he said, 'I don't even like you.' Such was the exalted state of his mind then.

"Bhavanath is married, but he only talks of spiritual matters with his wife.

"Both of them pass their time talking about God. When I said to him, 'Have fun with your wife,' he spoke sharply in anger, 'What! Shall we live a life of frivolity?' "

Sri Ramakrishna is now talking about Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna to the devotees — I haven't felt the same strong longing for the Younger Naren that I have for Narendra. But the Younger Naren doesn't have as much yearning as Narendra has.

(To Haripada) "Do you go to Girish Ghosh's house?"

Haripada — His house is quite close to ours. I often go there.

Sri Ramakrishna — Does Narendra go?

Haripada — Yes, sometimes I see him there.

Sri Ramakrishna — What is his opinion of Girish Ghosh's view (about Divine Incarnation)?

Haripada — He (Narendra) was defeated in arguement.

Sri Ramakrishna — No. He said, 'Girish Ghosh has so much faith, why should I argue with him?'

The brother of Judge Anukul Mukhopadhaya's son-in-law has arrived.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you know Narendra?

The brother of the son-in-law — Yes sir. Narendra is an intelligent boy.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Since he has praise for Narendra, he himself must be a good man. Narendra came the other day. He and Trailokya sang, but I found their songs insipid.

Baburam and guarding 'both the worldly and the spiritual' – go beyond knowledge and ignorance

Sri Ramakrishna looks at Baburam and speaks. Baburam is in the entrance class (tenth) in the school where M. is teaching.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Baburam) — Where are your books? Don't you want to study? (To M.) He wants to cling to both the worldly and the spiritual.

"This is very difficult. What use is it to know God only a little? Even Vaishishtha, though a rishi, suffered at the death of his son. Seeing this, Lakshmana was surprised and asked Rama about it. Rama said, 'Brother, what is strange? He who has knowledge also has ignorance.' When a thorn is

embedded in your foot, you have to look for another thorn to pull out the first one. Having done that, you should throw away both thorns. The thorn of jnana is needed to get rid of the thorn of ignorance. And then you should go beyond both."

Baburam (laughing) — That's what I want.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — But my boy, can you do it while holding to both? If you really want that, come away.

Baburam (laughing) — Pull me away.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — It was different when Rakhal was here. His father had agreed to it. It would create such a disturbance if these boys lived here.

(To Baburam) "You are faint-hearted. You don't have enough courage. Just see what the younger Naren says – that he would come again immediately."

Now Sri Ramakrishna goes and sits with the young devotees on a mat spread on the floor. M. is nearby.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I am looking for one who has renounced lust and greed. When I find some young man, I think that perhaps he might stay with me, but everyone has an excuse.

"A ghost was looking for a companion. If a person dies an unnatural death on Saturday or Tuesday, he becomes a ghost. So, as soon as this

ghost saw that somebody had fallen from the roof or had swooned on one of these days, he would run to him, hoping that the fellow, through an unnatural death, would turn into a ghost and keep him company. But as luck would have it, he saw each one of them survive. He did not find a companion.

"Just see, Rakhal is always talking about his wife. He says, 'What will happen to her?' When I put my hand on Narendra's chest, he half fainted and said, 'Oh! What have you done to me? I have my father and mother!'

"Why has the Divine Mother kept me in this state? Chaitanyadeva embraced sannyasa – so that everybody would pay him obeisance. Whoever salutes an Incarnation, even once, is liberated."

Mohini Mohan has brought some sandesh in a straw container for Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna — To whom does this sandesh belong?

Baburam pointed to Mohini Mohan.

Sri Ramakrishna utters "Om," and touches the sandesh; then he eats a little of it, transforming it into prasad, and gives it to the devotees. To everyone's surprise, he feeds Naren and a couple of other devotees with his own hand.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — This has significance. The Lord is more manifest in pure souls. When I used to go to the countryside (Kamarpukur), I would feed some of the boys in this way. Chiney Shankhari would say, 'Why doesn't he feed us that way?' How could I? Some of them had affairs with

their brother's wife or some other women. How could I feed them?

Chapter II

His great word about devotees in samadhi

Sri Ramakrishna is swimming in a sea of joy with his devotees around. He sits on the small cot and imitates the manners of a woman kirtan singer[1]. The woman singer is in her best dress. She stands, holding a coloured handkerchief in her hand, and coughs as if it were natural and then spits, raising her nose ring. When any important person comes in, she welcomes him, "Come in please," while still singing. At times she raises her arms and uncovers her amulet, armlet, bracelet and other jewelry for everyone to see.

Seeing Sri Ramakrishna's imitation, all the devotees burst into laughter. Paltu can't control his laughter. Thakur looks at him and says to M., "Isn't he a child? He is beside himself with laughter!"

Sri Ramakrishna (to Paltu, laughing) — Don't tell your father all this. What little regard he has for me will disappear. He is an 'Englishman[2]'.

Gossip during japa and dip in the Ganges

(To the devotees) "So many talk about worldly things during their daily prayers and devotions.

"Without uttering a word, keeping their mouths shut, they speak by signs: bring this, take

[1] Kirtaniya
[2] He means English educated

that away, 'Uh, Huh'. They do all these kinds of things. (Laughter.)

"And some bargain for fish with fishermen while counting their beads. Doing japa, with a finger they point out a particular fish. A ripe time indeed to settle their accounts! (All laugh.)

"Some of them go for a bath in the Ganges, but instead of thinking of God, they gossip about different worldly matters: 'Your son has been married, what jewelry did they give as a dowry?… So-and-so is very ill... Has so-and-so returned from her father in-law's house?… So-and-so came to see the girl (for matrimonial purposes). She would give a lot in dowry and have a very festive wedding ceremony... Harish is such a loving boy. He can't live without me for even a moment... I couldn't come these many days because I had to settle the marriage of such-and-such girl. I was so busy, you see.' All this gossip.

"Just see, they have come for a holy dip in the Ganges and talk only about worldly things."

Sri Ramakrishna looks steadily at Naren and soon goes into samadhi. Is he seeing the presence of God in a pure soul?

The devotees watch Sri Ramakrishna, this image of samadhi. There had been so much laughter, but now the room is still, as if no one were there. His body is motionless, his eyes fixed, and he is sitting with folded hands, as in a picture.

After awhile his samadhi breaks. His breathing had stopped; now he heaves a long sigh. Slowly he gains external consciousness. He looks at the devotees.

He is still in ecstasy. He addresses each devotee to some extent – about his state of mind, or what he will attain. (To the Younger Naren) "I had great longing to see you. You will attain the goal. Do come here once in awhile. Well, what do you prefer? Knowledge, or love and devotion for God[1]?"

The Younger Naren — Only love and devotion for God.

Sri Ramakrishna — To whom will he offer his love, if he doesn't know Him? (Pointing at M. and laughing) If you don't know him, how can you offer him your love? (To M.) But since a pure soul has said that he wants only love and devotion, it certainly has some meaning.

"Without inborn tendencies[2], love and devotion for God does not come spontaneously. This is the mark of prema-bhakti. Jnana-bhakti is love of God based on reasoning. (To the Younger Naren) Let me see your body. Take off your shirt. Let me see. If your chest is fairly broad, you will succeed. Do come here now and then."

Sri Ramakrishna is still in divine ecstasy. He affectionately addresses each devotee, saying –

(To Paltu) "You, too, will succeed spiritually. But it will take a little more time."

(To Baburam) "Why don't I pull you here? Because it would create a row in the end.

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[1] Bhakti
[2] Samskaras

(To Mohini Mohan) "You are already there. Only a little remains. When that is done, all household duties will fall off. But should all of them fall off?"

Saying this, Thakur looks affectionately at him, as if to read the feelings of the innermost recesses of his mind. Was Mohini Mohan thinking that one should give up everything for the sake of God? After awhile Sri Ramakrishna adds, "God keeps a teacher of the holy word[1] tied by a single string. Otherwise, who would propagate the holy word? He keeps this bond to enable him to teach humanity. The Divine Mother has kept you in the world just for this."

Now he addresses the young brahmin.

Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga – the state of the Brahmajnani and that of the liberated in this very life

Sri Ramakrishna (to the young man) — Give up knowledge and reasoning. Take up bhakti instead. Bhakti is the essence. Have you already been here for three days?

The Young Brahmin (folding his hands) — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Have faith. Depend on Her. Having done this, you will not have to do anything. Mother Kali will do everything.

"Knowledge can go to the outer gate. But love and devotion can enter the palace. The pure soul is unattached. He has both knowledge and ignorance within him, but he is not attached to either. There is fragrance in the air, sometimes good and

[1] The Bhagavata Pundit

sometimes foul, but the air is free from both. Vyasadeva was going to cross the Jamuna. The milkmaids came to the same crossing. They had to go to the other side to sell curds, milk and butter, but there was no boat. How were they to cross? They were standing there wondering how they could cross.

"Just then Vyasadeva said, 'I am very hungry.' The milkmaids fed him with milk, cream, and butter. Vyasadeva finished almost all they had.

"Addressing the river Jamuna, Vyasadeva then said, 'Oh Jamuna! If I have not eaten anything, may your waters part and make a path for us to cross over.' And this is exactly what happened. The Jamuna divided itself, leaving a path between the waters. Vyasadeva and the gopis crossed over the river by this path.

"The significance of Vyasadeva's words, that he had eaten nothing, is that he was a pure soul and the pure soul is unattached – it is beyond nature. It has neither hunger nor thirst, neither birth nor death; it is deathless, it never grows old – like mount Sumeru.

"He who has attained this knowledge of Brahman is liberated in this very life. He rightly realizes that the body and the Soul are separate.

"After God-realization one's identification with the body disappears. One realizes that the body and the Soul are separate – like a dry coconut. When the milk inside it dries up, the kernel becomes separate from the shell. The Atman continues to move about in the body. As soon as the water of

worldliness dries up, one realizes the Self – one knows that the Atman is separate from the body. An unripe betel nut and an unripe almond cannot be separated from their shells.

"But when they are mature, the betel nut and the almond are separate from their shells. When ripe, the juice is dried up. Similarly, on realizing Brahman, the water of worldliness dries up.

"But this knowledge is very difficult to attain. Brahmajnana is not attained by just talking. Some people pretend to have attained it. (Laughing) A certain person used to tell lies, but he said, 'I have attained Brahmajnana.' When reprimanded, he retorted, 'But why not? This world is like a dream. If it is all illusion, is the truth otherwise? Falsehood is, of course, false – but truthfulness is also false.' " (All laugh.)

Chapter III

For establishment of righteousness, I am born age after age[1] – a mystic talk

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting with his devotees on a mat spread on the floor. He is smiling. He says to the devotees, "Please stroke my feet a little." The devotees render him this service. (Laughing to M.) "This service has great significance."

Placing his hand on his chest, he continues, "If there is anything here, this service will erase all ignorance and illusion completely."

Then suddenly he goes into a profound mood – perhaps he will reveal a mystic experience.

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[1] Dharmasaṁsthapanārthāya sambhavāami yuge yuge (Gita 4 : 8)

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — There is no outsider here. The other day when Harish was here, I saw Sat-chit-ananda come out of this sheathe[1]. It said, 'I incarnate myself age after age.' I thought perhaps I was giving vent to my own thoughts, but I kept silent. Again Sat-chit-ananda spoke and said that Chaitanya had also worshipped Shakti.

The devotees listen to Sri Ramakrishna in amazement. Some of them wonder whether God – Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute – is Himself seated before them in the form of Sri Ramakrishna, whether God has once again incarnated Himself.

Addressing M., Sri Ramakrishna says, "I saw His perfect and full manifestation. But His supreme splendour was manifested through the quality of sattva."

The devotees are speechless with wonder as they listen to him.

Yogamaya – the Primordial Power – and the worldly sport of the avatar

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I said to the Mother (of the Universe), 'I can no longer talk much.' And I said, 'Grant, Oh Mother, that a person may attain awakening by just a touch.' Such is the supreme power of Yogamaya, She can perform this magic. In Her sport in Vrindavan, Yogamaya performed this magical feat. It was by Her power that Subol brought Radha to meet Krishna. Yogamaya – that is, Primeval Power – has this power to attract. I have made use of the same power.

[1] Sri Ramakrishna's body

"Well, do you think they who come here gain something?"

M. — Yes, sir. Why else would they come?

Sri Ramakrishna — How do you know?

M. (laughing) — Everybody says, 'Whoever goes to him never returns to the world.'

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — A big frog fell into the clutches of a non-poisonous snake. The snake could neither swallow it nor let it go. The frog suffered such pain – it croaked continuously. This was pain from a non-poisonous snake. Had it been caught by a cobra, it would have quieted down after a single croak. (All laugh.)

(To the young boy devotees) "Please read the book by Trailokya called *Bhakti Chaitanya Chandrika*. Get a copy from him. It contains beautiful facts about Chaitanyadeva."

A Particular Devotee — Will he give it to us?

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Why not? If there is a big crop of green melons in the field, the farmer can easily give away two or three. (All laugh.) Why won't he give it to you?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Paltu) — Come here now and then.

Paltu — I shall come to visit you whenever possible.

Sri Ramakrishna — Come and see me in Calcutta when I go there.

Paltu — I shall try.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is the answer of a calculating mind.

Paltu — If I didn't say that I would try, it would have been a lie.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I don't think they lie in what they say. They are not free (to move at will).

Sri Ramakrishna is talking to Haripada.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Haripada) — Why doesn't Mahendra Mukherji come?

Haripada — I'm not quite sure.

M. (laughing) — He practices jnana yoga.

Sri Ramakrishna — No. The other day he promised to send his carriage for us to see (the play) 'the Life of Prahlada'. But he didn't. Maybe that is why he doesn't come.

M. — One day he went to see Mahima Chakravarty and talked with him. It seems that he often visits him.

Sri Ramakrishna — But why? Mahima also talks of love and devotion to God. How nicely he chants the

hymn, 'What is the need of austerities if God is worshipped with love?'

M. (laughing) — He [Mahima] repeats the hymn when you ask him to.

Girish Ghosh has just begun to visit Sri Ramakrishna. These days he talks of nothing but Sri Ramakrishna.

Hari — Girish Ghosh sees many visions these days. When he leaves this place, he remains absorbed in spiritual moods – and he sees many things.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is possible. When one goes to the Ganges, one sees many things: boats, ships and what not.

Hari — Girish Ghosh says, 'I will now engage myself only in work. I will sit down with pen and ink at a certain time every morning. And the whole day keep writing.' He says this, but he can't do it. As soon as he sees us, he only talks about you. You asked for Narendra to be brought here. Girish Babu said, 'I will arrange a carriage for him.'

It is now five. The Younger Naren is going home. Standing alone on the long northeastern verandah, Sri Ramakrishna is giving him various instructions. After some time, the Younger Naren salutes Thakur and leaves. Many other devotees also leave.

Sitting on the smaller cot, Sri Ramakrishna talks with Mohini. Mohini's wife has almost gone mad because of the death of her son. She laughs, then she cries. But when she comes to Dakshineswar to see Sri Ramakrishna, she becomes peaceful.

Sri Ramakrishna — How is your wife?

Mohini — She becomes peaceful here. But at home she sometimes makes a terrible disturbance. The other day she wanted to commit suicide.

Hearing this, Sri Ramakrishna worries for some time. Mohini says humbly to him, "Do please say a word or two to her."

Sri Ramakrishna — Don't let her cook. It heats the brain. And she must not be left alone.

Chapter IV

The strange state of sannyasa of Sri Ramakrishna – conversation with Tarak

It is already dusk. Preparations are being made for arati in the temple. A lamp has been lit and incense burnt in Sri Ramakrishna's room. Sitting on the smaller cot, Thakur has offered obeisance to the Mother of the Universe and is chanting Her Name. There is no one in the room except M.

Sri Ramakrishna rises, so does M. too. Pointing at the western and the northern doors of the room, Thakur says to M., "Please shut those doors." M. shuts the doors and goes to Sri Ramakrishna, who is on the verandah.

Sri Ramakrishna says, "I would like to go to Kali's shrine." Saying this, he holds M.'s hand. Leaning on him, he reaches the platform of Kali's shrine. Before sitting down, he says to M, "Please call Baburam." M. fetches Baburam.

Having had the darshan of Kali, Sri Ramakrishna now returns to his room, walking

through the middle of the extensive courtyard. He chants, "Mother, Mother Rajarajeshvari."

Returning to his room, Sri Ramakrishna sits down on his small cot. He is in a particularly strange state of mind. He cannot touch anything metal. He says, "It seems that the Divine Mother is taking my mind completely off material riches." He takes water in an earthen vessel. Since he cannot touch the metallic pot used for washing, he has asked the devotees to bring an earthen pot. The moment he touches a metal pot or plate, his hand aches as if pricked by a horned fish.

Prasanna has brought a number of utensils; they are very small. Laughing, Sri Ramakrishna says, "The utensils are very small, but this boy is good. He stripped naked in front of me when I asked him to. How childlike!"

The devotee and woman; beware, sadhu

Tarak of Belgharia and a friend have arrived.

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller cot. A lamp is burning in the room. A couple of devotees are there, including M.

Tarak is married. His parents don't allow him to visit Sri Ramakrishna. His home is in Bowbazar, Calcutta. Tarak stays at home most of the time. Sri Ramakrishna is very fond of him. Tarak's companion is somewhat lazy (tamasic). He is inclined to ridicule religion and Sri Ramakrishna. Tarak is about 27 years old. When he arrives, Tarak prostrates before Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Tarak's friend) — Why don't you go to see the temple?

Tarak's Friend — I have already seen it.

Sri Ramakrishna — All right. What do you think of Tarak's visiting here?

Tarak's Friend — You know best.

Sri Ramakrishna (pointing at M.) — He is a headmaster.

Tarak's Friend — Oh!

Sri Ramakrishna makes polite enquiries of Tarak and talks to him about a lot of things. After a long spiritual talk, Tarak wants to leave. Sri Ramakrishna cautions him about several things.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Tarak) — Beware, sadhu! Beware of 'lust and greed'. Once you are drowned in the maya of lust, it is impossible to rise. There is a deep whirlpool in the Vishalakshi river. He who falls into it once can never again rise out of it. Please come again.

Tarak — My people won't let me.

A Devotee — If somebody's mother says, 'Don't go to Dakshineswar and swears, 'You will be drinking my blood if you ever go there...'

One may go against the advice of one's superior for God's sake

Sri Ramakrishna — The mother who says such a thing is not a mother. She is the image of ignorance. There is no harm in not listening to such a mother. Such a mother places hurdles in the way of God-realization. There is no harm in disobeying

the Guru for the sake of God. Bharata did not listen to Kaikeyi for the sake of Rama. The gopis did not listen to their husbands when they forbade them the darshan of Krishna. Prahlada did not listen to his father. King Bali did not listen to his guru, Shukracharya, for love of God. Bibhishana did not listen to Ravana, his elder brother, to reach Rama.

"You must listen to everything they say except in the matter of walking the path to God. Let me see your hand."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna seems to weigh Tarak's hand. After awhile he says, "There is a little hurdle. But it will pass in time. Pray to Him and visit this place now and then. You will get rid of it. Have you rented the Bowbazar house in Calcutta?"

Tarak — Not I. They have done it.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — Is it you or they? Are you afraid of the 'tiger'?

By 'tiger' Sri Ramakrishna means women [of non-divine nature, who take the mind toward darkness and away from God].

Sri Ramakrishna lies down on the smaller cot. Perhaps he is thinking of the welfare of Tarak. Suddenly he says to M., "Why am I so worried about him?"

M. does not say anything. Perhaps he is thinking what to say. Sri Ramakrishna insists on a reply, "Do speak up."

In the meantime Mohini Mohan's wife enters the room, salutes Sri Ramakrishna, and sits to one side. Thakur is talking to M. about Tarak's companion.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why did Tarak bring him here?

M. — It is a long distance, so he brought a companion with him.

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna addresses Mohini's wife, "One becomes a she-ghost when one dies an unnatural death. Beware. You must control your mind. After hearing so much and seeing so much, is it going to end this way ultimately?"

Mohini is taking leave of Thakur. He lies prostrate on the ground. His wife also salutes Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna stands near the northern door of his room. The wife, covering her head, says something to him in a low voice.

Sri Ramakrishna — You wish to stay here?

The Wife — Yes, I want to come and stay in the nahabat with the Holy Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna — That is good. But when you talk of dying, I am frightened – the Ganges is flowing so near.

Section XIII

Sri Ramakrishna at a Devotee's House in Calcutta

Chapter I

With his intimate disciples at Balaram Basu's house

It is long past three o'clock. Being the month of Chaitra it is very hot. Sri Ramakrishna is seated in Balaram's drawing room with one or two devotees; he is talking to M.

It is Monday, 6 April 1885; 25th of Chaitra, the seventh day of the dark fortnight. Thakur has come to Calcutta to a devotee's house. He will meet with his intimate disciples and visit Devendra on Nimu Goswami street.

Telling the truth and Sri Ramakrishna – the Younger Naren, Baburam and Purna

Thakur remains intoxicated day and night with ecstatic love for God – constantly absorbed in spiritual mood or in samadhi. His mind is totally unaware of the external world. His only interest is that his intimate disciples know the Self. He is like a parent, anxious about his weak or disabled children, always thinking how they might grow into manhood. Or he is like a bird always engaged in nurturing its young.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I had promised that I would come at three o'clock – that's why I'm here. But it's very hot.

M. — It is, sir. You have been quite inconvenienced.

The devotees fan Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna — I have come to see the Younger Naren and Baburam. Why haven't you brought Purna?

M. — He doesn't want to come to a gathering of devotees. He is afraid you might talk well of him before others and that members of his family will hear about it.

Pundits and holy men impart different instructions – company of sadhus

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, that's true. I won't talk about him from now on. You are giving religious instruction to Purna. That is very good.

M. — Well, Vidyasagar's book *Selection* says the same: love the Lord with body, mind and soul[1]. If we instruct our students in this way, the proprietors of the school are displeased. What should we do then?

Sri Ramakrishna — There are many ideas written in books. But the authors of the books do not assimilate the ideas themselves. It is only by keeping the company of holy men[2] that one can internalize them. It is only when a holy man with genuine renunciation instructs them that people

[1] With all thy soul love God above,
And as thyself thy neighbour love
[2] Sadhus

listen. When a mere pundit writes a book or lectures, people do not assimilate much. If a doctor with a pot of treacle by his side says to a patient, 'Don't eat treacle,' the patient doesn't listen to him.

"Well, how do you find Purna? Does he sometimes go into ecstatic moods?"

M. — No, I haven't found any outer signs of ecstasy in him. One day I told him what you had said.

Sri Ramakrishna — About what?

M. — What you had said – that an 'ordinary receptacle' can't contain ecstasy. A 'big receptacle' can enter into a deep ecstatic mood, but it does not show outwardly. As, you said, the surface of a big lake remains undisturbed when an elephant enters it, but when the elephant goes into a small pond, it produces a lot of commotion and the water splashes over the edges of the pond.

Sri Ramakrishna — Outwardly Purna would not show signs of ecstasy. He is an unusual 'receptacle'. All his signs are good. What do you say?

M. — He has beautiful, bright and prominent eyes.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is not enough that his eyes are bright. Spiritual eyes are different. Well, did you ask him what happened to him after meeting me?

M. — Yes, we did talk about that. For the last four or five days he has been saying that whenever he

thinks about God and repeats His name, tears flow from his eyes and the hair on his body stands on end.

Sri Ramakrishna — What more is needed?

Thakur and M. are both silent. After awhile M. says, "There he stands."

Sri Ramakrishna — Who?

M. — It is Purna. It appears that he is standing at the door of his house. If any of us passes that way, he comes running to salute us.

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah! Ah!

Thakur leans against a pillow to rest. M. had brought a twelve year old boy with him. He is a student at M.'s school. His name is Kshirode.

M. says, "This boy is very good. It makes him very happy to hear about God."

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — He has the eyes of a deer.

The boy touches Thakur's feet and prostrates to salute him. He gently strokes Thakur's feet in a very devotional manner. Thakur talks about the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Rakhal is living at home now. He is not well; he has a boil. I hear that he is probably going to have a child.

Paltu and Binode are seated in front of him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Paltu, smiling) — What did you say to your father? (To M.) He spoke up to his father when his father told him not to come here. (To Paltu) What did you say to him?

Paltu — I said, 'Yes I go to him. Is that wrong?' (Thakur and M. laugh). If I have to, I'll say this even more strongly.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to M.) — No. Should he go that far?

M. — I agree, sir. He should not go that far. (Thakur laughs.)

Sri Ramakrishna (to Binode) — How are you? Why haven't you come [to Dakshineswar]?

Binode — Sir, I almost went, but I was afraid. I have not been well.

Sri Ramakrishna — You must come. The breeze there is bracing. It would help you recover.

The Younger Naren has arrived. Thakur is going out to wash. The Younger Naren carries some water and a hand towel for him. M. is with them.

The Younger Naren washes Thakur's feet in the northern corner of the western verandah [of Balaram's house]. M. stands near him.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is very hot.

M. — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — How do you live in such a small room? Isn't it hot on the upper floor?

M. — Yes, sir. It is very hot.

Sri Ramakrishna — Besides, your wife has some disease of the brain. She should be kept in a cool place.

M. — Yes, sir. I have told her to sleep downstairs.

Thakur comes again to the drawing room and sits down. He says to M., "Why didn't you come [to Dakshineswar] last Sunday?"

M. — Sir, there was nobody else at home. My wife is suffering from the disease of the brain and there was nobody to look after her in my absence.

Now Thakur goes to Devendra's house on Nimu Goswami Street. He is accompanied by the Younger Naren, M. and one or two other devotees. He is talking about Purna; he is anxious about him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — He is a great 'receptacle'. Were it not so, could he have made me do japa for his welfare? But Purna doesn't know anything about that.

M. and the other devotees are speechless with wonder to hear that Thakur should have performed japa of the bija mantra[1] for Purna.

[1] A mystic word or words of great power to be recited silently within

Sri Ramakrishna — It would have been nice if you had brought him here with you today. Why didn't you?

Seeing the Younger Naren laugh, Thakur and the devotees also begin to laugh. Thakur points to him in a happy mood and says to M., "Look. Just see how naive he looks when he laughs, as if he knows nothing. He has no desire in his mind for anything; he does not want any of these three – property, wife, or money. One does not realize God unless 'lust and greed' have vanished from the mind."

Thakur is proceeding toward Devendra's house. Once he told Devendra in Dakshineswar that he was thinking of visiting him at his house. Devendra had said, "I came today specifically to ask you to. Kindly come this very Sunday." Thakur had said, "But you are not earning much. Don't invite many people. And it is so costly to hire a carriage." Devendra had laughed and replied, "What does it matter if my income is small? 'One must eat ghee even though one has to borrow. One must, however, definitely eat ghee.' " Hearing this, Thakur began to laugh. He couldn't control his laughter.

When he reaches the house, Thakur says, "Devendra, please don't prepare anything special for me to eat – just an ordinary meal will do. I am not feeling very well today."

Chapter II

In Devendra's house with devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is seated in the drawing room on the ground floor of Devendra's house. The devotees sit around him. It is already dusk. A lamp has been lit in the room. The Younger Naren, Ram, M., Girish, Devendra, Akshay, Upendra and other devotees are sitting close to him. Thakur is looking at a young

devotee and is beaming with joy. While instructing him, Thakur says to the other devotees, "He has no desire for any of the three things which bind one to the world – property, money, or wife. When one keeps one's mind on these three, one cannot establish union with God. And he had a vision, too." (To the devotee) "Tell me, what did you see?"

Renouncing 'lust and greed' and joy of Brahman

The Devotee (smiling) — I saw many pots of excreta. Some people were sitting on them and some sat a little away.

Sri Ramakrishna — He has seen the plight of worldly people who are forgetful of God. That is why he is developing renunciation for these things. Need one whose mind is freed from the attachment to 'lust and greed' worry about anything?

"Oh, how strange! I had to perform so much repetition of the Name and meditation to get rid of these desires. How is it that he has absolutely freed his mind from desire so quickly? Is it so easy to get rid of lust? Oh, what a sensation I felt in my chest even six months after starting my spiritual practices! I would lie under a tree and weep. I cried to the Divine Mother, 'Mother! If I experience the feeling of lust, I will cut my throat with a knife!'

(To the devotees) "If the mind is free from 'lust and greed,' what else remains to be attained? Then one enjoys only the joy of Brahman."

Sashi[1] had just begun visiting Thakur. He was a first year B.A. student at Vidyasagar's college. Thakur now talks about him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — As for that young man who visits, I see that for some time his mind will be attracted by money. However, I also see others who are not at all interested in it. Some of the young men will not marry.

The devotees listen to him without saying a word.

Who can recognize an incarnation of God?

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — Unless you have rid your mind completely of 'lust and greed,' you cannot recognize an incarnation of God. Somebody asked an eggplant merchant to evaluate a diamond. He said, 'I can give you ten seers of eggplants for it – nothing more than that.' (All laugh.) The Younger Naren laughs loudly.

Thakur notices that the Younger Naren has understood the essence of these words.

Sri Ramakrishna — What a subtle mind he has! The Naked One[2] could understand just as quickly – whether it was the *Gita*, or the *Bhagavata*, or some other scripture.

[1] Later Swami Ramakrishnananda
[2] Nangta; Totapuri

Dispassion from childhood is wonderful indeed – how can a prostitute be redeemed?

Sri Ramakrishna — It is indeed wonderful for one to renounce 'lust and greed' from one's childhood. Very few people develop such renunciation. And without it one is like a mango pecked by a kite – the fruit can't be used in the service of the deity. Even eating it yourself is risky.

"If a man who has committed many sins earlier in his life repeats the name of God in his old age, it is better than doing nothing.

"The mother of a certain Mallick comes from a very big family. She asked me whether a prostitute could be redeemed. She had herself led that kind of life in her earlier days – that's why she asked me. I said to her: Yes, she can be redeemed if she weeps with a sincere heart and intense longing and repents, vowing, 'I shall not repeat it.' Just repeating the Lord's name will not be of any help. One has to weep with a sincere heart."

Chapter III

Thakur in the joy of devotional songs and in samadhi at Devendra's house

The singing of devotional songs is going on, accompanied by drum and cymbals. The musician sings –

O! What a wonderful sight have I seen in Keshab Bharati's cottage!

O brother! A beautiful light glows on the face of Gauranga and he sheds a hundred streams of tears of love for God.

Gaur, surcharged with divine love, mad like an intoxicated elephant, sometimes dances and sings, and at other times rolls in the dust. His eyes are flooded with tears.

He is weeping and uttering Hari. And he is rending the mortal world and heaven with his thunderous voice. And then, taking a straw between his teeth[1] and folding his hands, he begs for liberation from slavery.

Shaving off his curly hair, he dons the cloth of a yogi. One's heart begins to melt on seeing the gush of his loving devotion for God.

Having been smitten by human sorrow, he has renounced his all and has come to dole out ecstatic love for God.

Premdas wishes only that he could become the slave of Sri Chaitanya's feet and move from door to door.

While listening to the song, Thakur becomes absorbed in ecstasy[2]. The musician is describing the state of the gopis of Vraja who are suffering the pangs of separation from Sri Krishna.

The gopis of Vraja find Madhava[3] in a madhavi[4] bower –

O madhavi, give me my Madhava. Give, do give; give me my Madhava.

Give me my Madhava and make me your slave forever.

Just as water is life for fish, Madhava is my life breath.

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[1] A Vaishnava expression meaning extreme humility, in that the cow, which chews straw, is the humblest of creatures
[2] Bhava
[3] An appellation of Sri Krishna
[4] A spring creeper with fragrant flowers

You have hidden him away. Knowing us to be helpless and innocent, you have hidden him from us.

I cannot live, O madhavi! without Madhava. I cannot do without the sight of my Madhava.

Now and then Sri Ramakrishna adds his own lines during the song, "How far is Mathura where dwells the beloved of my soul?"

Thakur goes into samadhi. His body is motionless. For a long time he remains in this state.

Now he returns to normal consciousness to some extent. He is, however, still absorbed in ecstasy. In this state he talks about the devotees and speaks to the Divine Mother now and then.

Sri Ramakrishna (still in ecstasy) — Mother, please attract him to You. I cannot worry about him any more. (To M.) As for your relative[1], he attracts my mind a little.

(To Girish) "You may go on using abusive language and vulgar words for a little longer. Let it continue. It is good that all this comes out of you. For people suffering from blood poisoning, the more it comes out, the better.

"There is noise when one is getting rid of *upashis*[2]. Firewood crackles when it burns. When it is totally burnt, it makes no sound.

"You will become more and more pure every day. You will rise higher and higher every day. People will be wonderstruck to see you. I may not be able to come here frequently. Be that as it may, you will attain by yourself."

---

[1] M.'s brother-in-law
[2] Limiting adjuncts

The ecstasy of Sri Ramakrishna is becoming more and more intense. He again talks to the Divine Mother, "Mother, what is heroic in making a good man even better? Mother, what will You accomplish in killing an already dead man? Your greatness lies in killing one who is standing erect."

Stabilizing himself a little, Thakur suddenly speaks somewhat loudly to the Divine Mother, "I have come from Dakshineswar. I am coming back, Mother."

It is like a child replying to his mother's call from a distance. Thakur is again motionless. He sits still in samadhi. The devotees gaze at him fixedly without saying a word.

Thakur speaks again in ecstasy, "I shall not eat any more *luchi*[1]." One or two Vaishnava priests[2] of the neighbourhood had come. They rise and depart.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna in the company of devotees at Devendra's house

Sri Ramakrishna is talking happily with the devotees. Being the month of Chaitra, it is very hot. Devendra has made some ice cream[3]. He is serving it to Thakur and the devotees. The devotees thoroughly enjoy the ice cream. Mani says in a whisper, "Encore! Encore!" Everybody laughs. At the sight of the ice cream, Thakur is as happy as a child.

Sri Ramakrishna — The devotional songs were nicely sung. How beautifully they described the state of the gopis, 'O madhavi, give me my

[1] Fried bread
[2] Goswamis
[3] Kulfi

Madhava.' This is the state of the gopis intoxicated with ecstatic love. How wonderful! They are mad for Krishna!

A devotee points at another and says, "He has the attitude of a female friend[1], the attitude of a gopi."

Ram — He has within himself both: the *madhura* bhava[2] and intense jnana bhava[3].

Sri Ramakrishna — What are you talking about?

Thakur now speaks of Surendra.

Ram — I sent him word, but he didn't come.

Sri Ramakrishna — He is so busy working, he can't come.

A Particular Devotee — Ram Babu has been writing about you.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What is he writing?

The Devotee — He has written on the love and devotion[4] of the Paramahamsa.

Sri Ramakrishna — Very good. It will bring Ram name and fame.

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[1] Sakhi
[2] The attitude of a lover
[3] One who follows the path of Knowledge
[4] Bhakti

Girish (smiling) — He has written it as your disciple.

Sri Ramakrishna — I have no disciple, or anything like that. I am the servant of the servant of Rama.

Some people of the neighbourhood have arrived, but Thakur is not pleased to see them. He says, "What kind of place is this? I find no one spiritual here."

Devendra now takes Thakur inside his house. Refreshments are ready to be served. Thakur goes in. However, he returns with a smile on his face and takes a seat in the sitting room. The devotees are sitting close by. Upendra[1] and Akshay[2], seated on either side of Thakur, are gently stroking his feet. Thakur talks about the ladies of Devendra's family. He says, "Nice ladies. They are from the countryside, so they are full of love and devotion for God."

Thakur is rejoicing in the company of the Self[3]. He sings happily. What is his state of mind as he sings? He has entered into a joyous mood, so he sings many songs.

Song –

Unless you are simple, you cannot recognize the Simple One[4].

Song –

O wandering sannyasin, stop for awhile. Hold your begging bowl and stop. Let me see your illumined face.

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[1] Upendranath Mukherji is a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna

[2] Akshay Kumar Sen is poet devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. He authored Sri Ramakrishna Punthi (Life of Sri Ramakrishna in verses), and thus immortalized himself. His birthplace is Maynapur village at Bankura district.

[3] *Atmarama*

[4] Sahaja, meaning God

Song –

A fakir[1], ever absorbed in the Divine, has arrived. Alike is his holiness to both Hindus and *Pir*[2] of the Muslims.

Girish salutes Thakur and leaves. Thakur returns his salute with a namaskar.

Devendra and other devotees take Thakur to the carriage.

Returning, Devendra sees a person from his neighbourhood sleeping on a wooden cot in the courtyard south of his living room. He calls out, "Rise. Please get up." Rubbing his eyes, the fellow gets up and asks, "Has the paramahamsa arrived?" Everybody bursts into laughter. This fellow came to meet Thakur even before he had arrived. Feeling hot, he lay on a mat-covered bench in the open courtyard. Thakur proceeds toward Dakshineswar. He says happily to M., "We ate plenty of ice cream! Please bring four or five cones for me when you visit." And he adds, "My mind is being attracted by some of these young men now – the Younger Naren, Purna, and your relative."

M. — Do you mean Dwija?

Sri Ramakrishna — Dwija is, of course, one of them. My mind is now going to the elder brother.

M. — Oh!

Thakur goes happily along in the carriage.

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[1] A mendicant ascetic
[2] A Muslim saint

Section XIV

Sri Ramakrishna in the Company of Devotees at Balaram's House

Chapter I

Thakur's description of his spiritual practices

Sri Ramakrishna is seated with the devotees in Balaram's sitting room in Calcutta. Girish, M. and Balaram are present. One by one the Younger Naren, Paltu, Dwija, Purna, Mahendra Mukherji and a number of other devotees arrive. Trailokya Sanyal, Gopal Sen and several other devotees of the Brahmo Samaj show up, one after the other. Many women devotees have come. Seated behind a straw curtain, they have the darshan of Thakur. Mohini's wife[1] is there. She is nearly mad with grief for her dead son. She and many others stricken with sorrow have the faith that they will find peace by coming in contact with Thakur.

It is Sunday, 12 April 1885, the first of Vaishakh, the 13th day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra. The time is about three o'clock.

When he enters, M. sees Thakur sitting with the devotees. He is describing his own spiritual practices and a variety of states of mind. M. salutes Thakur and sits close to him at his bidding.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — At the time (of spiritual practices) when I meditated I used to see a real person sitting close to me with a trident

[1] M.'s wife

in his hand. He threatened to strike me with the trident if I didn't fix my mind at the lotus feet of God, to pierce my chest and kill me if my mind was not fixed on God.

Union of the Absolute[1] and the phenomenal world[2] – Purusha and Prakriti – Yoga of Discrimination[3]

"Sometimes the Divine Mother would put me in such a state that my mind would descend from the Absolute to the phenomenal world. At other times it would rise from the phenomenal world to the Absolute.

"When my mind descended to the phenomenal world, I would meditate on Rama and Sita day and night. And I would constantly have the image of their forms before me. I used to go around holding Ramlala[4]. Sometimes I would give him a bath and other times feed him. And yet other times I was absorbed in the mood of Radha and Krishna. I would see their forms constantly before me. And then again my mind would be filled with the mood of Gauranga – he represents the harmonization of the two ideals, Purusha and Prakriti. In this mood I always saw the form of Gauranga. Later, this state also changed. Leaving the phenomenal world, my mind would ascend to the Absolute. I found no distinction between the ordinary sajina plant and the sacred tulsi. I no longer liked seeing the forms of God. I said to them, 'You, too, cause a feeling of separation' – so I let the forms go. I removed all the

[1] Nitya
[2] Lila
[3] Viveka
[4] Image of baby Rama made of eight metals

paintings and images of the deities that were in my room. I began to meditate on the Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda, the Primal Purusha. I had the attitude of a handmaiden – the maid of Purusha.

"I have practiced all kinds of spiritual disciplines. There are three classes – sattvic, rajasic and tamasic. In the sattvic practices, one calls upon Him with intense yearning, or simply repeats His sacred name without expecting any result. In rajasic disciplines one practices various kinds of exercises – purascharana[1], visits to places of pilgrimage, a certain duration of panchatapa[2], worship with sixteen articles, and so forth. The aspirant who practices tamasic sadhana takes recourse to the qualities of tamas. Such an aspirant calls out, 'Victory to Kali! Why will You not grant me Your vision? I'll cut my throat with a knife if You do not reveal Yourself to me!' The last kind of discipline is not morally pure – it is like the practices prescribed in the *Tantra*.

"During this time (of sadhana), I used to have strange visions. I distinctly saw the communion of the Atman. A person resembling me entered my body and communed with each one of the six lotuses. The petals of the six lotuses were closed. As he communed with each of them, the lotuses bloomed, one after the other – they opened and turned upward. In this way all the lotuses – of the Muladhara, the Svadhisthana, the Anahata, the Vishuddha, the Ajna and the Sahasrara – opened.

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[1] The performance of japa a certain number of times each day, methodically increasing and decreasing the amount

[2] Practicing japa and meditation seated within five fires

They were facing downward, but then they turned up. I perceived this phenomenon very clearly."

Discipline of Dhyana Yoga – like an unwavering lamp flame in a windless place

"During the practice of spiritual disciplines when I meditated, I would think of the flame of a lamp set in a windless place – the flame did not flicker in the least.

"In deep meditation the awareness of the outside world completely vanishes. A hunter was aiming at a bird while a bridal procession was passing nearby. What lights, bands, carriages and horses were in the procession! They all passed close to him, but the hunter was quite unaware of them. He did not know that a bridegroom had passed that way in a procession.

"A man was fishing alone on the bank of a pond. After a long time the float moved – at times it even dipped down. Taking the fishing rod in his hand, he tried to pull it up. Just at that moment a wayfarer stopped and asked, 'Sir, can you please tell me where Mr. Bannerji lives?' The fisherman did not reply. Fishing rod in hand, he was now trying to pull in his catch. The stranger repeated his question loudly, 'Sir, can you please tell me where such-and-such Bannerji lives?' But our fisherman was unaware of the outside world – his hand was trembling and his eyes fixed on the float. The wayfarer left in a huff. When he had gone quite some distance, the fisherman's float sank and he pulled the fish out onto dry land. Wiping his face with a hand towel, he shouted to the stranger, 'Hey,

brother! Listen.' The wayfarer didn't want to return, but he came back after hearing the fisherman shout for some time. He said, 'But, sir, why are you calling me now?' The fisherman replied, 'What were you asking me?' The wayfarer said, 'I repeated my question so many times and now you ask me what I was saying.' The fisherman said, 'The float was bobbing, so I didn't hear anything you said.'

"Such concentration is developed in meditation that a person sees nothing and hears nothing. He is not even aware of touch. A snake can wriggle over his body, but he does not know it – neither the one who is meditating, nor the snake, are aware of each other.

"The sense organs cease to function during deep meditation. The mind does not look outward. It is as if the door of the outermost room of the house is shut. There are five organs of sense – form, taste, smell, touch and speech – they are left outside.

"At the beginning of meditation, sense objects appear before the mind. In deep meditation they cease to form any impression – they are left outside. During meditation, I used to have many different kinds of visions. I saw before me a heap of rupees, a shawl, a big tray full of sandesh and two females with big round nose rings. I asked my mind, 'Oh my mind, what do you want? Do you want to enjoy them awhile?' The mind said, 'No, I don't want anything. I want nothing but the lotus feet of God.' I saw the inside and outside of the women, like one sees objects in a glass room. I saw

inside their bodies: the intestines, blood, excreta, worms, phlegm, mucus, saliva and urine – all these."

Eight occult powers and Sri Ramakrishna – profession of the guru and prostitution

At times Girish talks of curing disease by repeating Thakur's name.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish and the other devotees) — Only people of small intellect pray for occult powers – to cure a disease, to win a lawsuit, to walk on water, all these kind of things. A pure devotee wants nothing but the lotus feet of God. One day Hriday said to me, 'Uncle, ask the Divine Mother for some powers, for some occult powers.' I have a childlike nature. While practicing japa in the Kali Temple I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, Hriday wants me to ask You for some occult powers.' The Divine Mother at once showed me an old prostitute who came in front of me and sat on her heels with her back to me. She was a woman of about forty with large hips. She wore a black-bordered sari and noisily defecated. The Divine Mother showed me by this that all occult powers are like the excreta of an old prostitute. I then went to Hriday and scolded him, saying, 'Why did you teach me such a prayer! It is because of you that I had this bad experience.'

"People with a little occult power gain name, fame and authority over others. Many of them want to be Gurus to attain recognition and have disciples and attendants. People may say, "Gurucharan's brother is having a wonderful time these days. So

many people visit him and he has several disciples and attendants. His home is filled with goods. Many people give him presents. And if he wants, since he has the power, he can feed a multitude!

"Being a guru is like practicing the profession of prostitution. One sells oneself for such trifling things as money, name, fame and creature comforts. The body, mind and soul, which are meant to realize God[1], should not be pulled down for insignificant things. Someone said, 'Savi is on top of the world these days – she is so well off! She has rented a house and has so many things: cow dung cakes[2], a wooden cot, some cooking utensils, bedding, finely woven mats and pillows. Many men are under her spell and visit her often.' In other words, Savi has taken to prostitution. That is why she has all these conveniences. Before, she was a maid in a respectable household. Now she has become a prostitute. She has ruined herself for such insignificant things."

Temptations during the spiritual practices of Sri Ramakrishna – knowledge of Brahman and intellect of differentiation

Sri Ramakrishna and Islam

"During my spiritual practices, while meditating, I used to see many other kinds of visions. Once I was meditating under the bel tree. Sin, taking the form of a man, appeared before me and tried to tempt me in different ways. He had come in the form of a

[1] Nātmanamavasādayet (Gita 6:5)
[2] Used as fuel to cook food

white soldier. He wanted to tempt me with money, name and fame, sexual pleasure and different kinds of powers. I began to call out to the Divine Mother – this is a great secret – She revealed Herself to me and I asked Her to kill him. I still remember that form of the Divine Mother, that world-enchanting form, the form of Krishnamayi[1]. The whole universe seemed to move at Her glance."

Thakur stops talking. Later on, however, he says, "I have so much else that I am not being allowed to talk about – it is as if someone is shutting my mouth."

"Tulsi and the ordinary sajina plants appeared the same to me. My understanding of differentiation was taken away. I was meditating under the foot of a banyan tree. I was shown a Muslim with a beard who brought some cooked rice on a porcelain plate. He fed some of it to the *malechhas*[2] and then gave a little to me. The Divine Mother revealed to me: There is only One, without a second – it is Sat-chit-ananda alone who has assumed different forms. God Himself has become the living beings and the phenomenal world – indeed everything. It is He who has become food."

Sri Ramakrishna in a childlike mood, enters into ecstasy

(To Girish, M. and others) "I have the nature of a child. Hriday said to me, 'Uncle, ask the Divine Mother for some occult powers.' At once I went to the temple to ask for it. I was kept in such a state

[1] She was in the form of a young daughter of Balaram Bose
[2] A non-Hindu

that I had to listen to the person who lived with me. A small child sees darkness all around if there is no one near; I was put in such a state. I felt my life draining away unless Hriday was near me. Just see, the same mood is coming over me now. As I am talking, I am feeling inspired by God."

While speaking, Thakur goes into ecstasy. He loses all consciousness of time and place. He tries hard to control this divine mood. In ecstasy he says, "I still see you people. But I feel that you have been sitting here forever. I don't remember when you came or where you are."

Thakur remains still for a long time.

Returning somewhat to normal consciousness, he says, "I want some water." Thakur generally says this at the end of his samadhi, to bring his mind to a lower plane of consciousness. Girish is a newcomer and doesn't understand this. He starts to bring water. Thakur stops him, saying, "No, my dear, I am not able to drink water now." Thakur and the devotees remain silent for some time. Then he talks.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — My dear sir, have I been wrong to talk of all these (secret) things?

What can M. say in reply? He remains silent. Thakur then says, "Mother, how can it be wrong? I say all this to instill faith in others." After a long time, he says entreatingly to M., 'Will you arrange a meeting with him?" (He refers to Purna)

M. (hesitatingly) — Sir, I will send word to him right now.

Sri Ramakrishna (eagerly) — The end (of the cord) is here.

Does Thakur mean that Purna is the last of his intimate disciples? There is almost no one after him.

Chapter II

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna's mahabhava – Brahmani's service to him

Addressing Girish, M. and the others, Thakur describes his own experience of mahabhava.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — The joy that one feels after that experience equals the pain of separation before it. Mahabhava – that is, divine ecstasy – disturbs the body and the mind violently. It is like a big elephant pushing its way into a straw cottage. The whole house is shaken. It may even fall to pieces.

"The burning fire that one feels when one is separated from God is not ordinary. When Rupa and Sanatana[1] sat under a tree in that state, the leaves of the tree became scorched. I lay unconscious for three days in that state. I could not move. I lay in one spot. When consciousness returned, she (the Brahmani[2]) held me and took me for a bath. But I could not stand the touch of her hand on my body, so my body was covered completely with a heavy sheet. Then the Brahmani held me with her hand on the sheet and led me. The earth that had stuck to my body when I lay on the ground was baked.

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[1] Both were two great disciples of Chaitanya

[2] A Brahmin woman who was one of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual preceptors

"In that state I felt as though a ploughshare were sticking through my spine. I cried out, 'I am dying, I am dying!' But afterwards I was filled with great joy."

The devotees listen to this description of Mahabhava in amazement.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish) — You people don't have to go that far. My ecstasy serves only as an example. You involve yourself with so many things, but I have only one interest. I enjoy nothing but God. It is His will. (Smiling) There are trees with only one branch, just as there are other trees with five branches. (All laugh.)

"My experiences are only for illustration. As for you, live in the world – but without attachment. Some mud will stick to your body, but you must wipe it off as a mudfish wipes off mud. You will swim in muddy waters – even then your body should not be stained."

Girish (smiling) — You, too, have married. (Laughter.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — I married for the sake of samskara[1], but how could I live a worldly life? They put the sacred thread around my neck, but it dropped off. I couldn't keep it on. According to one school of thought, Sukadeva also married. He had a daughter, too – all for the sake of samskara. (All laugh.)

[1] Marriage is one of the ten samskaras, or purification rites in Hindu religion

"The world is nothing but 'lust and greed' – they make one forget God."

Girish — How can one free oneself from 'lust and greed'?

Sri Ramakrishna — Pray to Him with intense longing, pray that you develop the faculty of discrimination. God is the only Reality and all else is transitory – this is discrimination. One must purify water by passing it through a fine sieve. The dirt in the water remains on one side and the clean water passes to the other side of the sieve. Apply the sieve of discrimination to the world. Know Him and live a family life. It will then be the world of spirituality[1].

"Just see what bewitching power women have, the ones who are manifestations of ignorance[2], who tend to take one away from God. They make worthless fools of men. When I see a man and a woman sitting together, I say to myself, 'Oh, they are doomed!' (Glancing at M.) Haru was such a good-looking boy, but a witch possessed him. 'Oh Haru, where are you? Where have you gone? I say, where is Haru!' People saw him sitting quietly under a banyan tree – he had lost his beauty, his strength and his joy. The witch who lives in the banyan tree had cast her spell on him.

"If a wife says, 'Go there for awhile,' the fellow immediately rises to take leave. And if she says, 'Sit down,' he at once takes his seat.

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[1] Vidya
[2] Avidya

"A certain job-seeker became frustrated, continually visiting the manager of an office for a job and not getting it. The manager said to him, 'There is no vacancy now, but come from time to time and enquire about it.' In this way a number of days passed and the candidate became thoroughly disappointed. He shared his frustration with a friend. The friend said, 'How dumb you are! Why do you wear out your shoes visiting him again and again? You must contact Golap and you'll get a job in no time.' The candidate said, 'All right, I will go see her right now.' Golap was the manager's mistress. The candidate met her and said, 'Mother, unless you help me, I won't get a job. I am in great distress. I am a brahmin's son, where else shall I go? Mother, I have been without work for so many days! My children are starving without food. Just a word from you and I will get a job.' Golap asked the brahmin's son, 'Child, whom should I talk to?' She began to think, 'Ah, the poor brahmin. He is in great trouble.' The candidate said, 'Just say a word for me to the manager. Surely I will get a job then.' Golap said, 'I will speak to the manager this very day and arrange everything.' The next morning a person came to the candidate's house and said, "Please come to the manager's office. He has recommended you to his English boss[1], saying, 'He is a very competent person and has been appointed to the job. He will contribute a great deal to the business.' "

[1] Sahib

"Everybody is deluded by 'lust and greed'. But I don't like all that. Truly, I swear that I know about nothing but God."

Chapter III

Speaking truth is austerity for the age of Kali – *Ishvarakoti*[1] and *jivakoti*

A Devotee — A new cult by the name of 'Nava Hullol' has been started. Lalit Chatterji is one of its members.

Sri Ramakrishna — There are so many views. Every belief is a path to reach God. But everybody thinks that only his belief is right, that only his watch is giving the right time.

Girish (to M.) — What does Pope say? 'It is with our judgments[2] etc.'

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — I say, what does it mean?

M. — Everybody thinks that his watch gives the right time. But watches of different people seldom say the same.

Sri Ramakrishna — Even so, howsoever the watches may give incorrect time, the sun always

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[1] Eternally free and perfect souls

[2] It is our judgments as with our watches. None goes just alike, yet each believes his own.

moves correctly. One should match the time of the watch with the sun.

A Devotee — A certain devotee frequently tells lies.

Sri Ramakrishna — Speaking the truth is the austerity for the age of Kali. The other [ancient] austerities are not easy to practice in this age. By sticking to truth, one attains God. Tulsidas says –

> Telling the truth, taking refuge in Him, and considering other men's wives as your mothers,
>
> If these do not take you to Lord Hari, think of Tulsi as a liar.

"Keshab Sen agreed to pay the debt of his father. Anyone else would never have accepted it, for there was no record in writing. I went to Devendra's Samaj in Jorashanko and saw Keshab seated on the dais meditating. He was very young then. I told Mathur Babu that only the 'float' of this young man, out of all those meditating, had dipped under water. The 'fish' approached the 'bait' and circled around it.

"A person – I shall not name him – gave a false statement in court for ten thousand rupees. He asked me to make an offering to Mother Kali to win his lawsuit. Childish as I was, I made the offering to Her. He had just said to me, 'Father, make this offering to the Mother.' "

The Devotee — What a mean fellow indeed!

Sri Ramakrishna — But he had so much faith in me that he believed the Divine Mother would grant his prayer if I made the offering.

Referring to Lalit Babu's talk, Sri Ramakrishna says:

"Is it possible to get rid of one's pride? There are only a few people who are without pride. Balaram is one of them. (Pointing to a devotee) And this person too. Had they been anybody else, they would have parted their hair on one side and shown other traits of tamas, puffed up with the ego of learning. The fat brahmin still has a little pride. (To M.) Isn't Mahima Chakravarty very learned?"

M. — Yes, sir. He has read many books.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — I wish he would have a conversation with Girish Ghosh. We could then observe a discussion.

Girish (smiling) — Didn't he seem to say that anybody can become Sri Krishna by practicing spiritual disciplines?

Sri Ramakrishna — Not exactly. But something like that.

The Devotee — Sir, can everybody become like Sri Krishna?

Sri Ramakrishna — Incarnations of God or those born with some of their characteristics are called *Ishvarakotis*. Ordinary men are called jivas, or *jivakotis*. The latter can attain God by practicing

spiritual disciplines, but they don't return to normal consciousness after attaining samadhi.

"The *Ishvarakoti* is like the son of a king. He has the keys to all seven stories of the palace – he can climb to all seven floors and come down at his will. A *jivakoti* is like a junior official. He can only go to a small area in the seven-storied palace – that is all.

Harmony of jnana and bhakti

"Janaka was a jnani – he attained divine knowledge by practicing spiritual disciplines. Sukadeva, however, was the very embodiment of divine knowledge."

Girish — Ah!

Sri Ramakrishna — Sukadeva did not attain divine knowledge by practicing austerities. Narada, like Sukadeva, had the knowledge of Brahman, but he retained love and devotion for God in order to teach mankind. Sometimes Prahlada was in the mood of 'Soham[1],' and at other times he thought of himself as a servant, or as a child, of God. Hanuman was also like that.

"All cannot attain such a lofty state just by wishing it. Some bamboos are hollower than others; some are more solid inside."

[1] I am He

Chapter IV

'Lust and greed' and intense dispassion[1]

A Devotee — If all your experiences are just examples for us, what should we do?

Sri Ramakrishna — Intense dispassion is essential to attain God. You must renounce immediately what you think is an obstacle in your way to God. You cannot pass over it, saying, 'It can be dealt with later.' 'Lust and greed' are hurdles on the way. You must take your mind off them.

"It will not do to lack enthusiasm or diligence. A person with a small towel on his shoulder was going for a bath. His wife said, 'You are worthless. You are getting old and yet you have not been able to give up anything. You cannot live without me even for a day. Look at such-and-such person. What a man of renunciation he is!'

Husband — Why, what has he given up?

Wife — He has sixteen wives and he is renouncing them one by one. You will never be able to renounce.

Husband — Renouncing one by one! Oh, silly woman, he will not be able to renounce. If a man genuinely wants to renounce, does he do it bit by bit?

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[1] Vairagya

Wife (smiling) — Even so, he is better than you.

Husband — Silly woman, you don't understand. He cannot renounce. But I can. See? I am leaving.

"This is intense dispassion. No sooner does one attain discrimination than one renounces. He left with just a hand towel on his shoulder. He didn't come back to settle household affairs. He did not turn back even once to look at his home.

"A person who wishes to renounce must have great will power. He must be reckless, like a dacoit. A dacoit shouts, 'Kill, loot, murder!' before he commits a robbery.

"What should you do? Cultivate love and devotion for God and so pass your days.

"Unable to find Krishna, Yashoda became nearly insane with grief and went to see Radha. Seeing her grief, Radha appeared before her in the form of the Primal Power. She said, 'Mother, ask me for a boon.' Yashoda replied, 'What boon can I ask? Just grant that I may serve Krishna in body, mind and speech, that I may behold His devotees with these eyes, and go with these feet wherever He is enacting His divine sport, and that I may serve Him and His devotees with these hands. Let all my sense organs be engaged in the service of Him alone."

As Thakur speaks these words, he is about to pass again into divine ecstasy. All of a sudden he says, "Kali is the embodiment of destruction! No, She is Nitya Kali[1]!"

[1] The Eternal Divine Mother

Thakur controls his ecstasy with great difficulty. He takes a little water and then again begins to talk of Yashoda. Mahendra Mukherji enters. He and his younger brother, Priya Mukherji, have only recently started visiting Thakur. Mahendra has a flour mill and other businesses. His brother is an engineer. Both have assistants to look after their work, so they have a great deal of leisure. Mahendra must be thirty-six or thirty-seven, and his brother about two years younger. Their home is in Kedeti village and they also have a house at Baghbazar in Calcutta. A young devotee named Hari accompanies them on their visits to Thakur. He is married, but he has great love and devotion for Thakur. Mahendra has not been to Dakshineswar for quite some time, nor has Hari. Mahendra is fair in complexion, medium in build, and always has a smile on his face. He prostrates before Thakur. Hari also offers his salutations.

Sri Ramakrishna — Hello! Why haven't you come to Dakshineswar for such a long time?

Mahendra — Sir, I was away in Kedeti – away from Calcutta.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why? You have no children. You don't have to work for anybody. Still you have no leisure. It is disgusting!

The devotees remain silent. Mahendra is somewhat embarrassed.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahendra) — Why do I say this to you? You are guileless and generous at heart. And you have love and devotion for God.

Mahendra — Sir, it is for my benefit that you have said it.

Sadhus looking for money – the attachment for children

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — You don't have to put anything in the collection plate for the performance[1] here. That is why Jadu's mother says, 'All other sadhus only ask for something. But it is different with you, sir.' Worldly people are annoyed if they have to spend money.

"A theatrical performance was being given at a certain place. One fellow was very keen to see it. Peeping through the crowd, he saw people paying for it in a collection plate. He quietly stole away. Another performance was being staged somewhere else. He went there and, after inquiry, found that no collection would be taken. Soon a big crowd gathered. He pushed people with both hands and his elbows to enter. He found himself a good seat and, twirling his moustaches, sat down to listen. (Laughter.)

"And you have no children to distract your mind. A Deputy Magistrate was getting a salary of eight hundred rupees a month. He went to Keshab Sen's house to see a play (Nava Vrindavan). I was there. Rakhal and many other devotees had gone with me and were sitting close to me. Rakhal left his seat for a few minutes and the Deputy Magistrate came, sat down, and made his young child sit on Rakhal's seat. I said, 'Please don't take

[1] Yatra

this seat.' My state of mind was such that I would obey anybody who was sitting close to me. That is why I had seated Rakhal beside me. All through the play the Deputy talked to his son. The rascal did not look at the play even once. I have heard, too, that he is a slave to his wife. When she wants him to stand, he stands up; and when she asks him to sit, he sits down. And he didn't see the performance for that snub-nosed monkey of a son! Do you meditate?"

Mahendra — Yes sir, I meditate a little.

Sri Ramakrishna — You will visit Dakshineswar some time, won't you?

Mahendra (smiling) — Sir, you know very well where I have knots. Please straighten them out.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — First make a visit; then I can press you and see where you have developed the knots. Why don't you visit?

Mahendra — I can't come because of the great pressure of work. Besides, I have to visit my Kedeti house [in the countryside] sometimes.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahendra, pointing his finger at the devotees) — Don't these people have homes? Have they no work? How do they make it?

Bondage of wife

Sri Ramakrishna (to Hari) — Why don't you come to Dakshineswar? Is it because your wife has returned to live with you?

Hari — No, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Then why have you forgotten?

Hari — Sir, I fell ill.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — He has gotten thin, but his love and devotion to God[1] hasn't diminished. Who can even fathom the depth of his devotion! But it is of a somewhat troublesome nature! (Laughter.)

Thakur calls a devotee's wife by the name of 'Habi's mother'. The brother of Habi's mother has arrived. He is a college student and is about twenty. He has to leave to play cricket, so he rises. His younger brother is also a devotee of Thakur. He leaves with him. In a little while, Dwija returns. Thakur asks him, "Didn't you go with them?"

A certain devotee says, "Perhaps he has returned because he wants to hear the music."

Today Trailokya, a Brahmo devotee, is to sing devotional songs. Paltu arrives. Thakur says, "Look, Paltu has arrived."

Purna, another young devotee, has also arrived. Thakur has been able to get him here only after great difficulty. The members of his family strongly object to his visiting Thakur. He studies in class five in the school where M. teaches. The boy

[1] Bhakti

prostrates before Thakur. The latter makes him sit beside him and talks to him in whispers. Only M. is seated near them. The other devotees are talking of different things. Girish, sitting on the other side of the room, is reading a biography of Keshab.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Purna) — Come nearer.

Girish (to M.) — Who is this boy?

M. (irritated) — He is a boy, what else?

Girish (smiling) — I need no ghost to tell me that!

M. is afraid that others will know who he is, which might create a row in Purna's house and M. himself might get blamed. This is also the reason Thakur is talking to the boy in whispers.

Sri Ramakrishna — Did you practice all that I told you to?

The Boy — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you see anything in your dreams – a flame, the light of a torch, a married woman, a cremation ground? It is good to see these things.

The Boy — I dreamed about you. You were seated and you said something.

Sri Ramakrishna — What was I saying? Please tell me some of it.

The Boy — I don't remember now.

Sri Ramakrishna — Never mind. But it's very good. You will make progress spiritually. You do feel attracted to me, don't you?

After awhile Thakur says, "Won't you go there?" (to Dakshineswar)? The boy says, "I can't say if I will or not."

Sri Ramakrishna — Why? Don't you have a relative living there?

The Boy — Yes, sir, I have. But it wouldn't be convenient for me to go there.

Girish is reading Keshab Sen's biography written by Trailokya of the Brahmo Samaj. The book says, "The Paramahamsa Deva was initially very averse to the world, but he has changed his mind since meeting Keshab. The Paramahamsa now says that it is possible to lead a spiritual life in the household too." Some devotees who read this have brought it to Thakur's notice. They want to discuss it with Trailokya. All the passages from the book have been read out to Thakur.

Thakur's state – giving up company of devotees

Seeing the book in Girish's hands, Thakur says to Girish, M., Ram and the other devotees, "These people are busy living a worldly life, so they are harping on 'world'. They are living in 'lust and greed'. When one has realized God, one doesn't talk like this. After attaining the bliss of God, the world becomes like the droppings of a crow. I had brushed it all away in the beginning. I had not only given up the company of worldly people, but at times I even kept myself away from devotees. I noticed that the devotees were dying one by one, and my heart began

to writhe with pain. But now I do live in the company of a few devotees."

Chapter V

Thakur enjoys devotional songs in company of devotees

Girish has gone home. He will return.

Trailokya arrives with Jaygopal Sen. They offer salutations to Thakur and sit down. Thakur makes polite enquiries of them. The Younger Naren arrives and salutes Thakur by prostrating on the ground. Thakur asks him, "Why didn't you come this Saturday?" Trailokya is going to sing now.

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah, that day you sang the song of the All-Blissful Mother! What a nice song! The songs of other people seem insipid to me. That day I didn't even like Narendra's singing. Please sing the same song again.

Trailokya sings: Victory to Sachi's son!

Thakur leaves to wash. Women devotees are sitting behind a screen, eagerly awaiting him. He will go see them so they can have his darshan[1]. Trailokya's song continues.

Returning from the room, Thakur says to Trailokya, "Please sing for awhile the song about the All-Blissful Mother." Trailokya sings –

Divine Mother, how great is Your love for Your human children!

O Mother! Streams of the tears of ecstatic love flow from our eyes as soon as we remember You.

[1] Seeing, experiencing; paying respect to a holy place or person by a ceremonial visit; also the blessing or purification felt in the presence of holiness.

I have been guilty of transgressing Your laws since I was born.

Even so, You cast a loving glance from Your beautiful face and call upon me with such sweet words.

As I remember You, tears of ecstatic love begin to flow from my eyes.

Mother, I can no longer bear the burden of your ecstatic love!

My soul, having pierced my heart, cries to feel Your affection and love.

Mother, please accept me under the shelter of Your holy feet!

Listening to the song, the Younger Naren becomes merged in deep meditation. He sits there like a log of wood. Thakur says to M., "Just see what deep meditation he has plunged into! He has absolutely lost outer consciousness."

The song ends. Thakur asks Trailokya to sing, 'O Mother, make me mad with Thy love. What need is there for knowledge or reason?[1]'

Ram says, "Let us repeat the name of Hari." Trailokya sings –

O my mind, utter the name of Hari just once, do repeat His name.

Repeat the name of Hari. Let us go beyond the sea of this world.

M. says in a whisper, "O Lord, Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers…"

Thakur, too, asks for this song to be sung. Trailokya and the devotees all sing together –

O Lord, Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers are so full of compassion.

[1] For complete song see Volume I, Section XII

Thakur joins them in singing. As soon as the song ends, he sings another song –

Behold the two brothers[1] who shed tears on chanting Hari's name have come.

They who ask for prema (ecstatic love) even after receiving blows, these two brothers have come.

They who are Kanai and Balai of Vraja, these two brothers have come.

They who embrace even the pariah, these two brothers have come.

Just after this song is over, Thakur sings another song –

Behold, the whole of Nadia is shaking under the waves of the divine love of Gaur!

Thakur then adds –

Who are they passing, chanting 'Haribol, Haribol' with their lips?

O Madhai, please go and find out.

It seems Gaur and Nitai are going.

They who have golden anklets on their feet,

They who have shaven heads and rags on their bodies,

O Brother, they almost look mad!

The Younger Naren takes his leave.

Sri Ramakrishna — You must show great devotion to your parents. But if they are an obstacle on the way to God, don't obey them. Have determination and say, 'Oh, you rascal!'

[1] Gauranga and Nityananda

The Younger Naren — Truly, I am not in the least afraid of them.

Girish returns. Thakur introduces him to Trailokya, saying, "Please talk to each other for awhile." After they had had a little talk, he says to Trailokya, "Sing that song once again." Trailokya sings –

Victory to Sachi's son, Gaur, a mine of qualities, the love jewel, the sea of the joy of ecstasy.

What a lovely and charming form of golden hue! The joy of the eyes reflecting a beauty even greater than the stalk of a water lily.

His long arms reaching below his knees. The two delicate hands stretched out in love.

Face, like a beautiful lotus, drowned in the essence of love.

The locks of his hair waving in the air. Beautiful cheeks surcharged with the love of Hari. Unmatched attraction.

Merged in mahabhava, saturated with the nectar of Hari. And the hair of the body in horripilation with love.

Like a mad elephant, of golden complexion, all limbs surcharged with emotion, full of the love of God.

Always singing the praises of Hari, a hero of the nectar of love. He brings the light of joy in holy hearts; He is the sea of devotion for Chaitanya.

O, addressing the pariah as a brother, he embraces him with love, his eyes watering.

'Where is Hari, the treasure of my heart?' So saying, he weeps. He perspires and trembles and gives out thunderous cries.

The hair on his body stands on end. His lotus-like body looks so beautiful, having rolled in the dust.

It is the home of the nectar of Hari's sport. He is the spring of the nectar of bhakti, a friend of the helpless, Gaur of Bengal.

Blessed you are, Sri Chaitanya, the moon of love.

Hearing that Gauranga laughs, weeps, dances and sings, Thakur stands up, absorbed in ecstasy. He is completely unconscious of the external world.

Partially returning to normal consciousness, he says most humbly to Trailokya, "Please sing that song once: 'Oh, what have I seen…' "

Trailokya sings –

What an exquisite bright form of Sri Gauranga – his eyes streaming with the tears of love – have I seen in Keshab Bharati's hut!

The song ends. It is already twilight. Thakur is now seated with the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ram) — There are no musical instruments here. The song becomes lively when sung in accompaniment with a good musical instrument. (Smiling) Do you know how Balaram arranges a festival? Like a miserly brahmin whose cow should eat a little but yield milk in torrents! (All laugh.) Balaram has this kind of attitude: sing your own songs and play your own instruments. (All laugh.)

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna and spiritual life – take to worldly pursuits after God-realization

It is already dusk. Lights have been lit in Balaram's parlour and on the verandah. Sri Ramakrishna

salutes the Mother of the Universe, repeats the *mulamantra*[1] and chants Her Name. He is surrounded by devotees listening to the sweet name of God chanted by him. Girish, M., Balaram, Trailokya and many other devotees are still there. They want to discuss with Trailokya the section in the book 'Biography of Keshab' which talks of the change in the attitude of Thakur. Girish initiates the conversation.

Girish says to Trailokya, "You have written about the change in attitude of Sri Ramakrishna concerning worldly life. It is not really correct."

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya and the devotees) — Having enjoyed 'this' joy, one doesn't like the 'other' joy. Having tasted divine bliss, the joy of the world appears to be tasteless. If a man gets a shawl, he doesn't care for broadcloth.

Trailokya — I referred to people who wanted to lead a family life. I didn't say anything about renouncers.

Sri Ramakrishna — What are you talking about? People who harp on 'worldly duties,' if once taste the bliss of God do not like anything else. Their duties are reduced. Gradually, as they derive more bliss from spiritual life, they simply cannot perform their worldly duties. They seek that divine bliss alone. What are worldly pleasures and sexual joy compared to the bliss of God? Having once tasted the bliss of God, one runs after it madly – whether one can preserve one's worldly life or not.

[1] An esoteric word or words of great power repeated during prayer and meditation

"The chatak bird is dying of thirst. The seven oceans and all the rivers and reservoirs are full of water, but it does not drink from them. Its parched throat is almost cracking from thirst, yet it does not drink! It sits with its mouth wide open waiting just for the rainwater of the Svati[1] constellation of stars. All waters are dry except the water of the Svati constellation."

Two annas of wine and saving both sides

"He says, 'I shall hold to both God and the world.' Taking a small quantity of wine, a man may be pleasantly intoxicated and also conscious of the world. But can he be both after getting well drunk?

"One likes nothing else after experiencing the bliss of God. Any matter relating to 'lust and greed' then falls like a stone on the chest. (Thakur chants to the tune of the kirtan) 'It is different with others, but I like nothing else.' When one becomes mad with love for God, he is not attracted by money and the rest."

Trailokya — One certainly requires money to live in the world. One even has to hoard. There are so many things to spend money on – charity...

Sri Ramakrishna — What do you mean? That you have to accumulate money first, and then seek God? And you talk of charity and compassion! One spends thousands of rupees on the marriage of one's daughter – while his neighbours may be starving. How difficult he finds it to give them two fistfuls of

[1] The fifteenth of the twenty-seven zodiacal stars according to Hindu astronomy

rice! He calculates so much before giving them anything. He says to himself, 'People may be starving, but what can I do? Let the rascals live or die. What I care about is whether the members of my family are living comfortably.' One merely talks of compassion for all living beings!

Trailokya — There have been good householders too – for instance, Pundarika Vidyanidhi, the devotee of Chaitanyadeva. He lived the life of a householder.

Sri Ramakrishna — He was intoxicated up to his neck with the wine of divine love. Had he drunk a little more, he would not have been able to lead the life of a householder.

> Trailokya doesn't say anything in reply. M. says aside to Girish, "So, what he has written is not correct."

Girish (to Trailokya) — Then it is not true, what you have written.

Trailokya — Why so? One can practice spiritual life in the household. Doesn't he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] say that?

Sri Ramakrishna — Spiritual life in the household is possible. But one should first attain the knowledge of God[1] before entering family life – one should first realize God before living as a householder. Then 'even though one may swim in the black waters of lamp-black, the body will not be

[1] Jnana

stained.' One can then live like a mudfish. The household life which one leads after God-realization is a world of spirituality[1]. There is no 'lust and greed' in it – only devotion, devotee and God[2]. I, too, have a wife. I also have a few utensils in my room. I, too, feed a few vagabonds. And when devotees like Habi's mother come to visit, I also worry about them.

Chapter VII

Sri Ramakrishna and avatarhood

A Devotee (to Trailokya) — I read in your book that you do not believe in divine incarnations. You said this with reference to Chaitanyadeva.

Trailokya — Chaitanyadeva himself protested against the idea of divine incarnation. When Advaita and the other devotees in Puri sang a song saying, 'He indeed is God,' Chaitanyadeva shut the door of his room. God has infinite glories. As he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] says, the devotee is the living room of God. Does it mean that if the living room is well decorated, there is no splendour anywhere else?

Girish — He says that ecstatic love[3] alone is the essence of God. We need the person who is the conduit of this ecstatic love. He says that cow's milk flows through the udder, so we need the udder. No

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[1] Vidya
[2] Bhakti, bhakta and Bhagavan
[3] Prema

other parts of the cow's body are important to us – its forefeet, its legs, its horns, and so on.

Trailokya — The milk of God's ecstatic love is channeled through various conduits. He has infinite powers.

Girish — Can any other power match His ecstatic love?

Trailokya — It is possible if He who has the power wants it. Everything has sprung out of His power.

Girish — All may be His power, but there is also the power of nescience, or ignorance[1].

Trailokya — What is ignorance? Does such a thing as ignorance exist? It is merely a negation. For example, darkness is the negation of light. God's ecstatic love is invaluable – just a drop of it is like an ocean for us. But if you say that ecstatic love is the last word about God, it would mean that He can be limited.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya and the other devotees) — Yes, yes. That is true, of course. But if I take even a small quantity of wine, I become intoxicated. What need is there to find out how many gallons of wine there are in the tavern? What need is there for us to find out about the infinite powers of God?

[1] Avidya

Girish (to Trailokya) — Do you believe in the incarnation of God?

Trailokya — God incarnates Himself in his devotee. Infinite power does not manifest, it is simply impossible. It cannot manifest itself in any person.

Girish — We can serve our children as 'Brahma Gopala[1]'. Why can't we worship a spiritually elevated personality by calling him God?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya) — Why do you bother yourself with infinity? Do I need to touch your whole body to touch you? If you wish to take a dip in the Ganges, do you have to touch the water of the Ganges from Hardwar to Gangasagar? 'All troubles cease when the ego dies'. As long as one retains the feeling of 'I', so long one is conscious of differentiation. Nobody can know, nobody can express by word of mouth, what remains after the ego vanishes. Only that which exists remains. One cannot tell by word of mouth that this much power is manifested in this man and the remainder in another. Imagine the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda in which an earthen pot of ego is immersed. As long as there is the earthen pot, so long is the water divided into two parts – the water inside the pot and the water outside. The moment the pot breaks, it is all one stretch of water. One cannot even say this. Who remains to tell?

After this discussion, Thakur has a sweet conversation with Trailokya.

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[1] A name of God; baby Krishna

Sri Ramakrishna — Are you having a good time?

Trailokya — Well, the moment I get up from here, I'll become the same old self. Right now I am feeling very inspired.

Sri Ramakrishna — There is no danger of thorns, if one is wearing shoes. One has no fear of 'lust and greed' when one knows that 'God is the only Reality and all else ephemeral.'

Balaram takes Trailokya to another room when he is asked to serve the latter some refreshments. Sri Ramakrishna describes to the devotees the state of mind of Trailokya and people of his views. It is 9:00 p.m.

Who can recognize an incarnation of God?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish, Mani and other devotees) — Do you know what these people are like? A frog in a small well who has never seen dry land. It only knows its own small well. It will never believe that there is dry land. He has not tasted the bliss of God, so he goes on harping about the world.

(To Girish) "Why do you waste your breath on these people? They are living both a worldly and a spiritual life. Unless one has tasted the bliss of God, one cannot understand that bliss. Can one explain sex pleasure to a boy of five? Worldly people talk about God only from hearsay. Children, hearing their two old aunts quarrelling, learn to say, 'I believe in God,' 'I swear by God ...'

"Let it be. It is not their fault. Can everybody conceive of Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss

Absolute? Only twelve rishis were able to recognize Ramachandra as an incarnation of God – others could not understand. Some took him as an ordinary human being, others as a sadhu. Only a few knew him as an avatar.

"A person values an article according to his own wealth. A gentleman asked his servant to take a diamond to the market. 'When you come back,' he said, 'tell me how much each trader is willing to pay for it. First take it to an egg-plant seller.' The servant went to a trader in egg-plants. He examined it to evaluate it and said, 'Brother, I can give you nine seers of egg-plants for it.' The servant said, 'Brother, make it a little more. Give me ten seers of egg-plant.' The egg-plant seller said, 'I have already offered more than the market rate. You may give it to me if the price suits you.' The servant laughed. He returned the diamond to his master and told him, 'The egg-plant seller will not give more than nine seers of egg-plants, not one more. He said that he had already offered more than the market rate.'

"The gentleman laughed and said, 'Well, take the diamond now to a cloth merchant. This fellow deals in egg-plant. What does he know? The cloth merchant is wealthier. Let's see what he says.' The servant went to the cloth merchant and said, 'Sir, would you care to buy this diamond? How much would you pay for it?' The cloth merchant said, 'Well, you have brought something very nice. It can be made into a beautiful piece of jewelry. Brother, I can pay nine hundred rupees for it.' The servant said, 'If you give a little higher quote, I can give it to you. Let it be a thousand rupees, if not more.'

The cloth merchant said, 'Brother, don't bargain any more. I have already quoted higher than the market price. I can't pay a rupee higher than nine hundred rupees.' The servant returned to the master and said, laughing, 'The cloth merchant could not give a rupee more than nine hundred. He even said that he has already offered more than the market rate.' The master laughed and said, 'Now take it to a jeweler. Let us see what he says.' The servant went to a jeweler and the moment the jeweler glanced at it, he said, 'I can offer a hundred thousand rupees.' "

Godmen[1] and ordinary human beings

"These people talk of practicing religion while leading a worldly life. It is like a person who has shut himself in a room – with all the doors and windows closed – with just a small hole for a little light to come in from the roof. Can one see the sun with a roof overhead? What will he do with only a little light? 'Lust and greed' constitute the roof. Can one see the sun unless the roof is removed? Worldly people have, as it were, shut themselves inside a room.

"Incarnations of God are *Ishvarakotis*. They walk freely in the open – they are never bound to the world, they never imprison themselves. Theirs is not a gross 'I' – like that of worldly people. The 'I' of worldly people is bound – it is bound within the four walls, with a roof overhead. They can see nothing outside. The 'I' of an incarnation of God is the subtle 'I'. One can always see God through this

[1] Ishvarakotis

'I'. It is as if a person is standing within a four-walled enclosure. There is a limitless field on all sides. If there is a hole in the wall, one can see everything on the other side. If the hole is big enough one can even go out and return through it. The 'I' of the avatar is like this wall with a hole. Even while he remains on this side of the wall, he can see a limitless space beyond it. It means that he can always live in communion with God, even when he is in a human body. And then when he wills, he can merge into samadhi, having gone out of the big hole in the wall. If the hole is big enough, he can even visit and revisit. He can come down to the worldly plane even after passing into samadhi."

The devotees sit speechless listening to Thakur describe avatarhood.

Section XV

Sri Ramakrishna at Balaram Basu's House in Calcutta

Chapter I

Narendra and Hazra

Sri Ramakrishna is seated with the devotees in Balaram's parlour on the second floor of the house. He is smiling. A number of devotees, including Narendra, M., Bhavanath, Purna, Paltu, the Younger Naren, Girish, Ram Babu, Dwija, and Binode are sitting around him.

It is Saturday, 9 May 1885, three o'clock in the afternoon; the tenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Vaishakh.

Balaram is not at home. Being unwell, he has gone to Monghyr for a change of climate. His eldest daughter (who is now deceased[1]) has invited Thakur and the devotees and has celebrated their coming with a feast. Thakur rests awhile after the meal.

Thakur repeatedly asks M., "Please tell me whether I am large-hearted." Bhavanath laughs and says, "What will he say? He will keep quiet."

A beggar from north India has arrived to sing. The devotees listen to one or two of his songs. Narendra likes them. He says to the singer, "Do sing more."

[1] She was deceased at the time of M.'s writing of this Volume

Sri Ramakrishna — Enough! Stop! We don't want any more songs. Where is the money? (To Narendra) You asked him to sing, but who will pay!

A Devotee (smiling) — Sir, he takes you to be a rich man, the way you are leaning against that bolster. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — He may also think I am ill.

The topic of conversation now drifts to Hazra's egotism. Hazra had been compelled to leave the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar.

Narendra — Hazra now admits he was egotistic.

Sri Ramakrishna — Don't believe him. He says that so he can return to Dakshineswar. (To the devotees) Only Narendra says that Hazra is 'a grand person'.

Narendra — I still say so.

Sri Ramakrishna — But why, even when you have heard so many bad things about him?

Narendra — He has a few faults, but he has many more good qualities.

Sri Ramakrishna — He does have single-minded devotion[1] to his ideal.

[1] Nishtha

"He says to me, 'You don't like me now, but later you will want my company.' A goswami of Srerampore came the other day. He is a descendent of Advaita Goswami[1]. I wanted him to stay on for a day or two. I asked him respectfully to stay at Dakshineswar. Hazra said, 'Send him to stay with the treasurer of the temple.' What he meant was that the goswami might ask for some milk or food and that he would have to share with him. I said, 'You rascal! I myself prostrate before him because he is a goswami. You, on the other hand, live a worldly life, holding on to 'lust and greed,' and do all sorts of pranks. You perform a little japa and become egotistical. Don't you feel ashamed of yourself?'

"Sattva guna leads one to the Lord. Rajo guna and tamo guna take one away from Him. Sattva is described as white, rajas as red, and tamas as black. One day I asked Hazra to tell me how much sattva each one of us possessed. He said, 'It is sixteen annas[2] in the case of Narendra, and eighteen annas in my case.' I asked him, 'How about me?' He said, 'You still have tinges of red – sattva guna is only twelve annas in your case.' (All laugh.)

"Hazra used to sit and perform japa at Dakshineswar. While telling his beads, he would also try to make money from the visitors. He had incurred a debt of several thousand rupees in his native village. Talking of the brahmin cook, he remarked, 'Do I care to talk to people like that?' "

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[1] An intimate disciple of Chaitanyadeva
[2] Sixteen annas make one Rupee, or one complement

Desire is an obstacle to God-realization – God has nature of a child

"You know what the truth is? Even if you have the least desire, you cannot attain God. The progress of actions can be very subtle. Say you have to thread a needle. It will not enter the eye of the needle if there is the least fibre sticking out.

"Why does one not attain God even after telling the beads for thirty years? If one has a festering wound, powerful measures have to be applied to cure it. Ordinary medicine alone does not cure the wound.

"Howsoever much religious discipline you may practice, you will not achieve spiritual perfection if you have desires. However, this fact is also true: You can attain perfection at once by the Lord's grace and compassion. Just as all darkness is dispelled in a moment when a light is brought into a room that has been dark for a thousand years.

"Say a poor man's son has attracted the attention of a big man. The latter gives his daughter in marriage to him. Immediately he has everything: a house, furniture, a horse-drawn carriage, maids and attendants, clothes and other comforts."

A Devotee — Sir, how does one receive God's grace?

Sri Ramakrishna — God has the nature of a child. Think of a boy holding jewels in the end piece of his cloth. A number of people are passing by. Many of them ask him to give them the jewels. Placing his hand on the cloth and turning his face away, the

boy says, 'No, I will not give you any.' But he may run after someone else who has not asked him for the jewels and give all of them away.

Renunciation brings God-Realization – his earlier story – attitude of Mathur Babu

Sri Ramakrishna — One cannot realize God unless one renounces.

"But who will accept my words? I am looking for a companion – a companion with the same attitude as mine. When I see a devout devotee, I say to myself, 'Perhaps he will accept my ideal.' But later I see that he has become quite a different man.

"A ghost was looking for a companion. One becomes a ghost if one dies an unnatural death either on Tuesdays or Saturdays. Whenever this ghost found that somebody was dying an unnatural death on a Saturday or a Tuesday, he would run to him. He thought to himself that he was perhaps now going to have a companion. But no sooner did he come near the ghost than he saw the man getting up. Perhaps he had fallen from a roof and had lost consciousness, but didn't die.

"Once Mathur Babu was in an ecstatic mood. He remained intoxicated, unable to do any work. Everybody said, 'Who will manage his estate if he remains like this?' They thought that the younger Bhattacharya (Sri Ramakrishna) had cast a spell on him."

Narendra loses outer consciousness – two stories of the guru and the disciple

"On one of Narendra's first visits to Dakshineswar, he lost outer consciousness when I touched his chest with my hand. Regaining consciousness, he began to weep and said, 'I say, why did you do this to me? Sir, I have my father, I have my mother.' This 'me' and 'mine' comes from ignorance.

"A guru said to his disciple, 'The world is illusory, so leave it and come away with me.' The disciple replied, 'But Master, all these people love me a great deal – my father, my mother, my wife. How can I leave them to accompany you?' The guru said to him, 'Although you repeat 'me' and 'mine,' and you say that they all love you, you are very much mistaken. I am going to teach you a trick of deception. Try it and you will know whether they genuinely love you or not.' Saying this, the guru put a pill in the disciple's hand and said, 'Take this and you will look like you are dead, but you will not lose consciousness and you will be able to hear and see everything. When I visit you, you will gradually regain normal consciousness.'

"The disciple did exactly as he was told. There was weeping and wailing in the house. The mother, the wife, everyone began to weep, having fallen on the ground. Just then a brahmin came and asked them what had happened. They all replied that the man had died. The brahmin felt his pulse and said, 'What? He is not dead. I will give him some medicine. As soon as he takes it, he will be cured.' Every member of the family felt as if they had been granted something very precious. 'But,' the

brahmin continued, 'there is a condition. Somebody has to take the medicine before it is given to him. And that person will die. I see that he has so many loving relatives; someone will surely take it. His mother and wife are wailing so bitterly. One of them will certainly take it.'

"At once the wailing stopped and there was silence. The mother said, 'It is such a big family. If I die, who will look after them all?' She was very worried. The wife who was weeping and wailing just a few moments ago, saying, 'Oh my elder sister, I have fallen into big trouble,' now said, 'What had to happen to him has already come to pass. I have small children. Who will look after them if I die?'

"The disciple saw and heard everything. He stood up at once and said, 'Master, let us go. I will follow you.' (All laugh.)

"Another disciple said to his guru, 'My wife serves me so well, Master. I can't leave her behind to follow you.' This disciple practiced hatha yoga. The guru taught him a ruse, too. One day there was a lot of weeping and wailing in the house. The neighbours came and saw the practitioner of hatha yoga seated on a small carpet in the house, his body stiff and twisted. Everybody thought that he had breathed his last. His wife was crying and had fallen on the ground, saying: 'Oh mother, what catastrophe has befallen me! How have you provided for our future? Oh my friends, I never imagined I would meet with such a fate.' In the meantime her relatives brought a cot to take him out of the room.

"But then a problem arose. He could not be taken through the door since his body was stiff and twisted. A neigbour ran and brought an axe and began to chop the door frame. The wife was weeping bitterly. Hearing the sound of wood being chopped, she came running and, still weeping, asked, 'What are you doing?' He said, 'The body can't be taken out, so we are chopping away the door frame.' 'Please,' the wife said, 'don't do this. I am a widow now. There is nobody to look after me and I have to bring up these children. If the door is chopped, I will not be able to replace it. I say, he is already dead. You must chop off his hands and feet.' Hearing this, the hatha yogi stood up. The effect of the medicine had worn off. He stood up and said, 'You mean woman! You are going to chop off my hands and feet?' Saying this, he renounced home and went away with his guru. (All laugh.)

"In most cases mourning is a pretense. When a woman has to wail, she first removes her nose ring and other ornaments. She locks them safely in a box. Then she comes out, falls on the ground and wails, beating her breast, 'Oh my friends! What misfortune has befallen me!' "

Chapter II

Narendra and others discuss incarnation of God in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna

Narendra — How can I believe, without proof, that the Lord incarnates Himself as a human being?

Girish — Faith in itself is sufficient proof. This article is lying here. What is the proof? Your faith alone is the proof.

A Certain Devotee — Have philosophers been able to prove that the external world exists outside us? They only say we have an irresistible belief in it.

Girish (to Narendra) — Even if the Lord came before you, you wouldn't believe it. You might say, 'This man says that God Himself has incarnated in him – but he is surely an impostor.'

The topic of discussion is now whether the heavenly gods are immortal.

Narendra — Where is the proof?

Girish — Even if you saw them in front of you, you wouldn't believe them.

Narendra — I want proof that they existed in past ages.

Mani whispers something to Paltu.

Paltu (smiling, to Narendra) — What is the need for immortals to be without a beginning? For one to be immortal, one has only to be without end.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Narendra is the son of a lawyer, and Paltu of a deputy magistrate. (All laugh.)

All are silent for awhile.

Jogin (smiling, to Girish and other devotees) — He (Thakur) does not accept Narendra's opinions any more.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Once I said to Narendra that the chatak bird drinks no water except rainwater. Narendra said that the chatak drinks ordinary water too. Then I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, are my words not true?' I was terribly worried. Narendra came on another day. He saw some birds fluttering in the room. Seeing them he said, 'There they are! There they are!' I asked, 'What?' He replied, 'The same chatak birds.' I saw that they were only bats. Since then I don't accept what he says. (All laugh.)

Is vision of the form a delusion of the mind?

Sri Ramakrishna — Narendra said to me in Jadu Mallick's garden, 'The visions of God that you see are all hallucinations.' Amazed, I said to him, 'But they speak to me!' Narendra said, 'Such delusions happen.' Then I went to the Divine Mother and implored Her with tears, 'Mother, what is this? Is it all false? Narendra said so.' The Divine Mother then showed me Consciousness, Indivisible Consciousness, and said, 'If your visions are illusions, why do they tally with facts?' Then I said to Narendra, 'Rascal, you are robbing me of my faith! Don't come here again.'

Sri Ramakrishna – scriptures and word of God – revelation

The discussion continues. Narendra is arguing. He is twenty-two years and four months old.

Narendra (to Girish, M. and others) — How can I put my faith in religious texts? The *Mahanirvana Tantra* says at one place that a person goes to hell if he doesn't attain the knowledge of Brahman. Then at another place it says, 'There is no salvation without worshipping Parvati, the Divine Mother.' In the *Manusamhita*, Manu writes about himself, while Moses describes his own death in the Pentateuch.

"The *Samkhya* philosophy says God does not exist for the reason that His existence cannot be proved. It also says, 'One must believe in the injunctions of the *Vedas*, that the *Vedas* are eternal scriptures.'

"I don't deny what the scriptures say. I just don't understand them, so please explain them to me. People have explained the scriptures based on their own interpretation. Which opinion shall I accept? A white light looks red when it goes through a red medium, and green when it passes through green glass."

A Certain Devotee — The Lord has said so in the *Gita*.

Sri Ramakrishna — The *Gita* is the essence of all scriptures. A sannyasin may or may not have any other book, but he must have a pocket *Gita* with him.

A Certain Devotee — The *Gita* contains the words of Sri Krishna.

Narendra — The *Gita* contain the words of Sri Krishna – or any other fellow!

Sri Ramakrishna listens to these words of Narendra in amazement.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is a very good discussion.

"There are two interpretations of religious texts: the literal and the real. One should only take the real – that which tallies with the words of God. There is a great difference between what you read in a letter and what you hear from the lips of the letter writer. A religious text is like the words of a letter, and the Lord's word is like the words of the letter writer. I accept nothing till I have seen that it agrees with the Divine Mother's words."

The discussion again turns to God-incarnate[1].

Narendra — It is enough if one has faith in God. There is no need for me to know where God is strolling, or what He is doing. Infinite is the universe and infinite are God's incarnations.

Hearing the words "Infinite is the universe and infinite are God's incarnations," Sri Ramakrishna bows with folded hands and says, "Ah."

Mani whispers something to Bhavanath.

Bhavanath — He says, 'If one has not seen an elephant, how can he know whether or not it can pass through the eye of a needle? Similarly, if one has not known God, how can one know by

[1] Avatar

reasoning whether God can incarnate Himself as a human being?'

Sri Ramakrishna — Everything is possible for God. It is He who casts the spell. The magician can thrust a dagger into his throat and take it out again. He can even swallow pieces of brick!

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and work – his state of knowledge of Brahman

A Devotee — The members of the Brahmo Samaj say that the duties of family life should be performed. One should not renounce them.

Girish — Yes, I read that in their paper, the *Sulabha Samachar*. It says that. But one is not able to perform all the actions required to know God. How, then, can he think of performing other worldly duties?

Sri Ramakrishna smiles a little and, looking at M. beckons with a sign of his eye, as if to say, "What he says is right."

M. has understood that performing duties[1] is very difficult.

Purna has arrived.

Sri Ramakrishna — Who told you about my being here?

[1] *Karmakanda*

Purna — Sarada.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the women devotees present) — Please give him (Purna) some refreshments.

Now Narendra would like to sing to Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees.

Narendra sings –

Song –

The mountain, the ocean and the firmament thunder. O Rudra, wake up!

You are the God of gods, the Supreme God, you are the *Kala* (death) of *kala* (time), You are the Supreme *Kala*.

O Shankara Shiva, the lord of justice, take away my sins.

Song –

O refuge of the lowly, Your holy name is beautiful indeed!

A current of nectar flows within it. One who hears it becomes at peace.

Song –

O mind, why don't you call upon Him who removes the fear of danger?

What an irony that you remain ever intoxicated with the world, which is nothing but an illusion!

Your wealth, your kith and kin will not last. Why forget Him?

Give up the insignificant and worship the substantial. Your trials of the world will end.

Listen attentively to these words of good, and retain them in your heart.

Repeat the name of Hari on your lips and proclaim Him ever and anon.

If you wish to cross over the ocean of the world, give up your sense attachments.

And surrendering your body, mind and soul to Him, worship Him.

Paltu — Will you sing that song?

Narendra — Which one?

Paltu —

When I have seen Your peerless face beaming with intense love,

What fear of earthly woes and frowns of catastrophe!

Narendra sings the song –

When I have seen Your peerless face beaming with intense love,

What fear of earthly woes and frowns of catastrophe!

Just as the first ray of the dawning sun dispels darkness,

So too, O Lord, when Your blessed radiance brightens the heart,

Its sweet consolation acts as a balm to the grief-stricken heart of the devotee.

When I ponder in my heart Your ecstatic love and Your grace,

I cannot restrain my tears of joy; they overflow my heart.

Victory to You, Gracious One, victory to You!

Singing about Your intense love for the devotee,

Let my life-breath ebb away while I perform Your work.

He sings another song at M.'s request. M. and many other devotees sit with folded hands listening to this song.

Song –

O my mind, drink the wine of Hari's nectar and be intoxicated.

Roll on the ground, weeping and chanting, 'Hari, Hari.'

Let the name of Hari thunder deep in the firmament.

Raise both of your arms and dance, crying, 'Hari, Hari.'

Go to people's doors and dole out the name of Hari.

Swim day and night in the nectar of the joy of God's love, and sing Hari's name.

Let your supreme desire be fulfilled and lowly desires be destroyed.

Song –

O my mind, meditate on Lord Hari, the rarefied spirit, the spotless one...

Song –

Wondrous and supreme is Your creation...

Song –

The sun and the moon blaze like lamps and the stars dazzle like diamonds in the dish of the sky.

The soft Malaya breeze is the incense and the wind moves to and fro as a fan before your holy face.

The whole forest has burst into brightness. All the vegetation in the forest is glowing with light.

What a unique worship of Yours is this! You, the breaker of world bonds, Your worship!

The *Anahata Shabda*, the uncaused sound, constitutes the drum beat.

Song –

Fix your mind, O man, on the Primal Purusha, the Stainless One...

At the request of Narayan, Narendra sings again –

O my Mother! Come, do come. You are my sweetheart, You, the marionette of my life breath.

Mother! Please take your seat in my heart and let me gaze at You.

I have been looking at Your face since my birth.

You, of course, know, my Mother, what sorrows I have passed through.

Pray, open the lotus of my heart and reveal Yourself in it, O Goddess of joy and bliss.

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi – in the state of knowledge of Brahman

Narendra sings a song of his own choice.

Song –

O my Mother! Your effulgent form shines in pitch darkness.

Therefore the yogi meditates in the mountain cave.

Sri Ramakrishna is going into samadhi as he listens to this song of samadhi. Narendra sings the song time and again –

O my mind, drink the wine of Hari's nectar and be intoxicated.

Sri Ramakrishna is absorbed in divine ecstasy. He is sitting on a pillow, leaning against the wall and

facing north, his feet hanging down. The devotees surround him on all sides.

Thakur is talking alone with the Divine Mother, absorbed in ecstasy. He says, "I shall go after taking my meal. You have come? Have you found your lodging, left Your baggage there, and then come out?"

Is Thakur saying that the Divine Mother has arrived? Are Thakur and the Divine Mother separate from each other?

Sri Ramakrishna says, "I don't like anybody's company now. Mother, why should I hear devotional songs? They will draw part of my mind to the outside world."

Thakur is gradually regaining outer consciousness. He looks at the devotees and says, "I used to wonder why people kept fish alive in a pot. I would say to myself, 'How cruel they are,' as they would kill it later. When the state of my mind began to change, I noticed that the body was nothing but a pillowcase. It doesn't matter if it survives or not. There is no difference if it goes."

Bhavanath — So, can one kill a human being, murder him?

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, one can do it in that state of mind[1]. But not everybody attains this state, the state of the knowledge of Brahman.

"One enjoys God's love and the devotee only when one comes down a step or two (from samadhi).

"In God there is both knowledge[2] and ignorance[3]. Vidya maya takes one toward the Lord,

[1] The Atman is not killed when the body is slain
[2] Vidya [3] Avidya

avidya maya takes one away from Him. Spiritual knowledge, love and devotion for God[1], compassion and dispassion belong to the realm of vidya. By resorting to them, one draws near to God.

"And if one takes a step up, one reaches Him – attains the knowledge of Brahman. In this state one clearly perceives that God Himself has become everything. He sees no difference between acceptance and denial. He cannot be angry with anyone.

"I was going by carriage when I saw two prostitutes standing on a verandah. I took them as the embodiment of the Mother of the Universe Herself. So I bowed to them.

"When I first attained this state, I could neither worship Mother Kali nor offer Her food to eat. Haladhari and Hriday said, 'The manager of the temple says that if the priest [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] does not offer food to the deity, what else might he do?' When I heard these malicious words, I simply laughed – I didn't feel the least irritated.

"After attaining the knowledge of Brahman, one should move about enjoying the divine sport. A sadhu was walking through a city enjoying its sights. He met another sadhu, an acquaintance of his. The latter said, 'You are walking around enjoying yourself, but where is your baggage? I hope nobody has stolen it from you.' The former said, 'No, my luggage is not stolen. I first arranged for lodging, and then placed it safely in the room

[1] Bhakti

and locked it. Now I am going around enjoying the sights in the city.' " (All laugh.)

Bhavanath — This is a very lofty idea.

Mani (to himself) — To enjoy the divine sport after attaining the knowledge of Brahman! To come down to the plane of the phenomenal world after attaining samadhi!

Sri Ramakrishna (to M. and others) — Is it easy to attain the knowledge of Brahman? It is not possible until the mind is completely annihilated. A guru said to his disciple, 'Give me your mind and I will give you divine knowledge.' The Naked One (Totapuri) used to say, 'Don't let your mind scatter.'

Biology – 'Natural Law' in the spiritual world

"In this state, one likes nothing but talk about God and the company of devotees.

(To Ram) "You are a doctor. You know that medicine works only when it mixes with the blood. Similarly, in the state of the knowledge of Brahman, one sees God both within and without. One sees that He has become the body, the mind, the vital breath and the soul."

Mani (to himself) — Assimilation!

Sri Ramakrishna — One attains the state of Brahmajnana when the mind is annihilated. When the mind vanishes, one's ego is wiped out – that which goes on repeating 'I,' 'I'. One reaches this

state through the path of love and devotion for God as well as through the path of divine knowledge, that is to say the path of discrimination. The jnani reasons saying, 'Not this, not this,' – that is to say, 'it is all maya, like a dream.' This world is 'not this, not this,' – it is just maya. When the world disappears, only the individual remains – that is, the pot of 'I-consciousness' remains.

"Imagine that there are ten pots full of water. They all reflect the sun. How many suns do you see?"

A Devotee — Ten reflected suns and one true sun.

Sri Ramakrishna — Imagine now that one of these pots breaks. How many suns do you see?

The Devotee — Nine reflected suns. And, of course, the real sun.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, suppose nine pots are broken. How many suns will you see?

The Devotee — One reflected image of the sun and the true sun.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Girish) — What remains after the last pot is broken?

Girish — That real sun, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — No. There are no words to describe what remains. It is what really is. When there is no reflected sun, how can you say that

there is the real sun? In the state of samadhi the 'I' vanishes. What a man sees then, cannot be expressed in words when he comes down to a lower plane.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna heartens the devotees with hope and promises

It is twilight. Lamps are lit in Balaram's parlour. Sri Ramakrishna is still in an ecstatic mood. Devotees surround him. He says in his state of ecstasy:

"I am saying this to you as no outsider is present here. He who sincerely tries to know God will realize Him. He will assuredly know Him. He who yearns for God and seeks nothing but Him will succeed.

"All the devotees of the inner circle have already come. The devotees who will come later will belong to the outer circle. They will also go there [to Dakshineswar] every now and then. The Divine Mother will instruct them, 'Do this. Call on God in this way.'

God alone is the guru – the only way for the embodied being to attain liberation

"Why doesn't the mind of embodied being turn toward God? The attraction (of Mahamaya) is much stronger than that of God. The orderly of a judge is more powerful than the judge. (All laugh.)

"Rama said to Narada, 'Narada, I am very happy to hear your hymn of praise. Please ask for a

boon from me.' Narada said, 'Rama, grant that I may have devotion[1] to your lotus feet and faith[2]. And grant that I may never be enchanted by your world-bewitching maya.' Rama said, 'So be it. Please ask for another boon.' Narada said, 'Rama, I don't want anything else.'

"Everyone is enchanted by His world-bewitching maya. Even when God takes up a human body, He too is enchanted by maya. Rama wandered about weeping in search of Sita. Bound by the five elements, even Brahman laments.

"Even so, remember, if God wills He can liberate Himself at once."

Bhavanath — A railway guard, of his own will, shuts himself in a coach, but he can come out whenever he wants to.

Sri Ramakrishna — *Ishvarakotis*, such as divine incarnations, can be liberated whenever they want. But ordinary human beings cannot. Embodied beings are bound by 'lust and greed'. They have shut the doors and windows of their houses and fastened them tightly with screws. How can they come out?

Bhavanath (smiling) — They are like third class railway passengers. They are locked in their compartments; they can't get out.

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[1] Bhakti
[2] Shraddha

Girish — If a man is bound in this way from all sides, then what is the way for him?

Sri Ramakrishna — He has nothing to fear if God, having come down as the guru, cuts asunder the bonds of maya.

> Is Thakur hinting that he himself has taken up a human body in the form of the Guru and is breaking the bonds of maya?

Section XVI

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at the House of a Devotee

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at Ram's house

Sri Ramakrishna has come to Ram's house. He is sitting in the ground floor parlour surrounded by devotees. He is smiling and full of joy talking to them.

It is Saturday, 23 May 1885. The 10th day of the bright fortnight of Jaishtha. The time is about five o'clock. Mahima is sitting in front of Thakur. M. is on his left side and Paltu, Bhavanath, Nityagopal and Harmohan sit around them. When Sri Ramakrishna had entered the room, he had enquired after the welfare of the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Hasn't the Younger Naren arrived yet?

The Younger Naren appears in a few minutes.

Sri Ramakrishna — And that person hasn't come?

M. — Who, sir?

Sri Ramakrishna — Kishori. And aren't Girish Ghosh and Narendra coming?

Narendra soon arrives and salutes Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the devotees) — It would have been nice if Kedar (Chatterji) had come. He agrees with Girish Ghosh. (Laughing, to Mahima) He, too, says the same [that Sri Ramakrishna is an incarnation of God.]

A kirtan is being arranged in the room. With folded hands, the musician says, "Please give your permission to start singing."

Thakur says, "I wish to have some water first."

After having refreshments, he takes some spice powder from a small bag and asks M. to close the bag.

The kirtan starts. The sound of the drum puts Thakur in an ecstatic mood. As he hears 'Gaur Chandrika,' he merges completely in samadhi.

Nityagopal is close to him. Thakur stretches his legs out on Nityagopal's lap. Nityagopal is also passing into ecstasy. All the devotees watching his state of samadhi are speechless with wonder.

Yoga, subjective and objective – identity of the Absolute, the soul and the cosmos

Partially returning to outer-consciousness, Thakur speaks, "Descending from the Absolute to the phenomenal and ascending from the phenomenal to the Absolute." (To Nityagopal) "Which one do you like?"

Nityagopal (humbly) — Both are good.

Sri Ramakrishna says, shutting his eyes, "Is God visible only in this way? Is it that He is visible only when you shut your eyes, and He does not exist when you don't? The Absolute belongs to the same Reality as the phenomenal world; the phenomenal world belongs to the same Reality as the Absolute."

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima) — I say this to you, my dear, just once.

Mahimacharan — Sir, both are by the will of God.

Sri Ramakrishna — Some people climb seven stories and cannot come down. But some, having climbed the seven stories, can come down – and ascend again as well.

"Uddhava said to the gopis, 'He whom you call Krishna dwells in all beings and the elements – He has become the world and its creatures.'

"So I ask: Is meditation possible only with eyes shut? Is it not possible with eyes open?"

Mahima — I have a question to ask.

A Devotee — Doesn't he need to attain Nirvana[1] sometime?

His earlier story – Totapuri wept – is Nirvana the end of life?

Sri Ramakrishna — It is not essential to attain Nirvana. There is, in fact, the Eternal Krishna[2] and there are His eternal devotees. Krishna[3] is the embodiment of Consciousness, and His realm is Consciousness too.

"There is the moon and there are stars. Just so, where there is the Eternal Krishna, there are also His eternal devotees. Don't you yourself say, 'If

[1] Total annihilation of the ego
[2] Nitya Krishna
[3] Shyam

the Lord is seen both within and without, what is the need for austerity[1]?' I told you that if a devotee is born of Vishnu, his seed of love and devotion for God does not vanish. I fell into the hands of a jnani. He taught me Vedanta for eleven months. But the seed of bhakti did not die in me. Wherever my mind would go, it came back to repeat, 'Mother, Mother.' The Naked One[2] would weep when he heard me sing devotional songs. He would say, 'Oh, how wonderful!' See, he was such a big jnani and even he was moved to tears! (To the Younger Naren and others) Once the seed of bhakti has fallen into your heart, it cannot but sprout. Gradually you will see its tree, its fruit and its flowers.

" 'The pestle will destroy the whole clan[3]'. The pestle was rubbed a great deal, until most of it was ground away. Yet a little piece of it still remained. And the whole dynasty of the Yadus was annihilated with that small piece of pestle[4]. Reason and argue a thousand times, but if you have the seed of love and devotion for the Lord within, you will come back and chant 'Hari, Haribol.' "

The devotees listen to Sri Ramakrishna without uttering a word. Laughing, Thakur asks Mahimacharan, "What do you like most?"

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[1] Refer Narada Pancharatra to find the complete text of this hymn.
If Hari is both inside and outside what need is there of penance. And if He is not there, what need of penance? If you worship Hari, what need is there of penance? And if you do not, what need of penance? So, O brahmin, get disengaged, dear boy. What is the need of penance? Go at once to Shankara, the sea of jnana. Attain deep devotion for Hari, which the Vaishanavas speak of.

[2] Totapuri

[3] Mūsalam kulanāśanam

[4] Reference: a story in the Mahabharata in which a curse on a pestle destroyed the Jadu clan

Mahima (smiling) — Nothing. However, I like mangoes.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Would you eat them all yourself? Or would you share with others?

Mahima (smiling) — I have no great desire to share. It is enough for me to eat them myself.

Sri Ramakrishna's correct attitude

Sri Ramakrishna — But do you know what my attitude is? Is God not visible when I open my eyes? I accept both the Absolute[1] and the phenomenal[2].

"When one has realized God, one knows that He Himself is self-existent[3] as well as the All-pervading in the form of the universe[4]. He is the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute and He has also become the world and its living beings."

Mere knowledge of scriptures is illusory – direct knowledge is obtained by practice of spiritual disciplines

"The practice of spiritual disciplines is essential. Mere study of scriptures does no good. I found Vidyasagar very learned. But to what end? Didn't you see that his only joy was to teach boys how to read and write? He has never tasted the Bliss of God. What will mere study do? What does one

[1] Nitya
[2] Lila
[3] *Svarata*; He alone exists, without any support
[4] *Virat*

assimilate of the injunctions of the scriptures? The almanac says there will be twenty measures of rainfall, but however much you press the almanac, not a drop of water comes from it."

Mahima — There are so many duties that one has to do in the world. Where is the time for the practice of spiritual disciplines?

Sri Ramakrishna — Why, don't you yourself say that the world is like a dream?

"Seeing the ocean in front of him, Lakshmana took a bow and arrow in his hand and said angrily, 'I am going to kill Varuna[1]. This ocean keeps us from going to Lanka.' Rama explained to him, saying, 'All that you see is like a dream, ephemeral. The ocean is ephemeral – and so is your anger.' To dispel the unreal with the unreal is illusory too."

Mahimacharan remains quiet.

Karma Yoga or Bhakti Yoga? Who is the Sadguru?

Mahimacharan has many household duties to perform. Also, he has founded a new school – for the purpose of doing good to humanity.

Sri Ramakrishna now talks about other things.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima) — Sambhu said to me, 'I want to spend this money on acts of public good – to build schools and dispensaries, construct roads and build bathing ghats on the river.' I said, 'It will be good if you can do it without expecting

[1] The presiding deity of the waters

any return. But it is very difficult to work without any selfish motive. Some desire somehow creeps in. I ask you this: If the Lord reveals Himself to you, will you pray to Him for such things as schools, dispensaries and hospitals?'

A Particular Devotee — Sir, what is the way for worldly people?

Sri Ramakrishna — Keeping the company of holy men and listening to spiritual talk.

"Worldly people are intoxicated – they are inebriated with 'lust and greed'. A drunkard gradually comes to his senses if he is fed rice water in small quantities at regular intervals.

"And one must listen to the instructions of a Sadguru[1]. There are signs of a Sadguru. One should listen about Kashi from one who has visited Kashi, who has seen it. A man of mere learning will be of no help. One should not listen to the instructions of a pundit who has not realized that the world is ephemeral. Only a pundit who has gained discrimination and dispassion[2] has the right to instruct mankind.

"Samadhyayi said that the Lord is totally devoid of sweetness, love and bliss[3]. He called Him joyless and tasteless who is the very fountain of love and bliss[4]! Somebody said, 'My maternal uncle keeps a cowshed full of horses.' (Everybody laughs.)

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[1] A perfected Master; a genuine spiritual preceptor
[2] Viveka and vairagya
[3] *Neeras*
[4] *Rasaswaroop*

'I' and 'mine' constitute ignorance – jnana and vijnana

"Worldly people are intoxicated with worldliness. They are always thinking: 'I am the doer of all these actions. And this home and family are mine.' Baring his teeth, a man says, 'What will happen to them (wife and children)? How will they manage without me? Who will look after my wife, my family?' Rakhal said, 'What will happen to my wife?' "

Harmohan — Did Rakhal say that?

Sri Ramakrishna — What else could he do? He who has knowledge also has ignorance. Lakshmana said to Rama, 'Rama, how strange! Even a saint like Vaishishtha Deva is suffering the bereavement of his son!' Rama said, 'Brother, he who has knowledge also has ignorance. You must go beyond both knowledge and ignorance.'

"Take, for example, a person whose foot is pierced by a thorn. He finds another thorn to take out the first one. After he has removed the former with the help of the latter, he throws away both thorns. To pull out the thorn of ignorance, one has to use the thorn of knowledge. When one throws away both the thorns of knowledge and ignorance, one attains vijnana. Assimilating the idea that the Lord exists, one has to know Him in a special way. One must talk to Him intimately. This is vijnana. That is why Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, 'You must go beyond the three gunas.'

"To attain vijnana, one has to take refuge in vidya maya[1]. Vidya maya includes the discrimination that the Lord is the Reality and the world ephemeral – this idea, in other words, constitutes discrimination and non-attachment. Besides, vidya maya also includes chanting His Name and glories, meditation, keeping the company of holy people, prayer, and so on. Vidya maya is like the last few steps leading to the roof – climb a step or two more and you are on the roof. To be on the roof is God-realization."

Worldly people and young men who have renounced 'lust and greed'

"Worldly people are intoxicated – inebriated with 'lust and greed'. They have lost their awareness. That is why I am fond of the young men. 'Lust and greed' have not yet entered their minds. They are 'good receptacles' and can be of use in the Lord's work. Worldly people are full of worthless stuff. They are like bony fish – trying to eliminate the bones, one is left with nothing in the end, very little meat.

"They are like mangoes struck by a hail storm. They can be eaten only when purified by sprinkling them with Ganges water. They cannot, generally speaking, be offered in the worship of the Deity. If one has to use them at all, one has to take recourse to the knowledge of Brahman, that is to say, tell the mind that God Himself has become everything."

[1] Vidya maya is the aspect of maya which leads man closer to the realization of Brahman

A Theosophist gentleman has arrived with Aswini Kumar Dutta and the son of Behari Bhaduri. The Mukherji brothers come in and salute Thakur. Arrangements for a kirtan have been made in the courtyard. At the sound of the drum, Sri Ramakrishna leaves the room and comes to the courtyard. The devotees follow him and take their seats there.

Bhavanath introduces Aswini to Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur introduces M. to Aswini by pointing at him. They are both in conversation when Narendra arrives and sits down. Thakur says to Aswini, “This is Narendra.”

Section XVII

Sri Ramakrishna with Captain, Narendra and other Devotees, at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Beginning of Sri Ramakrishna's throat ailment

Sri Ramakrishna is resting in his room at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. Saturday, 13 June 1885, the first day of the bright fortnight of Jaishtha. It is the last day[1] of the month of Jaishtha. The time is three o'clock. After his midday meal, Thakur is having a siesta on the smaller of the two cots.

A pundit is sitting on a mat on the floor. A sorrow-stricken brahmin woman[2] is standing near the northern door of the room. Kishori and a neighbour of Akhil, with a boy from Assam, are also present. M. enters and salutes Thakur. He is accompanied by Dwija and others.

Sri Ramakrishna is not well. He is feeling cold because of a lump in his throat. This is the beginning of his throat disease.

Because of extreme heat, M. has also not been feeling well. He has not been able to come regularly to Dakshineswar to see Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna — I say, you have arrived. The bel-fruit you sent me is very good. How are you?

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[1] Sankranti

[2] Golap-ma (Golap Sundari Devi), a companion and friend of Holy Mother

M. — I am feeling a little better now.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is very hot. Eat some ice now and then. I am feeling unwell, too, my dear, because of this extreme heat. I have eaten too much ice cream, so I have developed a lump in my throat. I have never experienced such a bad smell in my saliva before.

"I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, please cure me. I will not eat ice cream again.'

"Then I said to Her that I wouldn't eat ice either."

Sri Ramakrishna and holding on to truth – the state of a jnani and a devotee of God

"When I have promised the Divine Mother, 'I will not eat it,' I won't. But sometimes I forget and make a mistake. I once said that I wouldn't eat fish on Sundays, but one day I ate it by mistake.

"However, I never break my promise knowingly. The other day I asked a devotee to take my wash pot to the Jhautala (willow grove). As he had to go elsewhere, somebody else brought the pot. After answering the call of nature, I noticed that it was somebody else holding the wash pot. I could not use the water from the pot. What was I to do? I stood there with some clay in my hand [to use as soap] until the first man brought water for me.

"When I renounced everything by offering flowers at the lotus feet of the Divine Mother, I said to Her, 'Here, Mother. Take your purity and take your impurity, take both your righteousness and

unrighteousness. Here, Mother, take your sin and virtuous deeds. Here, take your good and take your evil. But pray grant me pure love and devotion for God.' I could not say to Her, 'Here, Mother, take your truthfulness and take your falsehood' – I couldn't do that."

A particular devotee brought some ice. Thakur asks M. again and again, "Well, my dear, should I eat it?"

M. says humbly, "Sir, please don't eat it until you have consulted the Divine Mother."

Sri Ramakrishna did not take the ice.

Sri Ramakrishna — Purity and impurity are for a devotee, not for a man of knowledge. Vijay's mother-in-law said, 'Well, what have I attained? Even now I cannot eat just anybody's food.' I said to her, 'Does one attain spiritual knowledge by eating everyone's food? A dog eats anything and everything. Does that mean the dog possesses spiritual wisdom?'

(To M.) "Why do I eat different kinds of food? Lest I become monotonous and be forced to part from them (the devotees).

"I said to Keshab Sen, 'If I talk to you of higher spiritual ideas, your organization and group of devotees will break up.'

"In the state of divine knowledge, groups and organizations are illusory – like a dream.

"I gave up eating fish. In the beginning I used to suffer, but later on I got used to it. If someone burns a bird's nest, it flies hither and thither, taking shelter in the sky. If one genuinely realizes

that the body and the world are unreal, one's soul attains samadhi.

"Earlier I experienced a state of mind similar to that of a jnani. I didn't enjoy people. I would hear that a jnani or a devotee lived in Hathkhola. After a few days, I would learn that he had died. So I didn't enjoy people any more. After that incident, the Divine Mother brought my mind down and rested it in devotion, in love for God and devotees."

M. listens with wonder to the change in Thakur's state of mind. Thakur is now telling the devotees why the Lord incarnates Himself as a human being.

Secret meaning of the avatar and his divine sport as a human being – Dwija and past samskaras

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Do you know why the Lord incarnates Himself as a person? It is because one can hear God's words only from the lips of a man. Devotees enjoy His divine bliss and taste His sweetness through a human body.

"But there is some manifestation of God's power in all devotees. It is like getting a little taste of something you have been sucking for a long time, or like extracting a little honey from a flower after much sucking. (To M.) Did you understand this?"

M. — Yes, sir. I understand it well.

Thakur talks to Dwija. He is fifteen or sixteen years old. His father has married a second time. Dwija occasionally accompanies M. to see Thakur. Thakur is very fond of him. Dwija says that his father did not want him to come to Dakshineswar.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Dwija) — Do your brothers also hold me in low esteem?

Dwija does not reply.

M. — After experiencing a couple of blows from the world, any low esteem they entertain for you will be knocked out.

Sri Ramakrishna — They are already receiving blows, since they have a stepmother.

Everyone is silent.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — You should introduce him (Dwija) to Purna.

M. — All right, I will. (To Dwija) You must go to Panihati.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes. I ask everybody to go to Panihati. (To M.) Will you go?

Thakur will attend the celebrations at Panihati, so he is asking the devotees to go too.

M. — Sir, I do want to go.

Sri Ramakrishna — We will have to take a big boat, so it won't rock. Will Girish Ghosh be there?

Everlasting Yea and Everlasting Nay

Thakur looks at Dwija.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, there are so many young men. How is it that only he comes here? Tell me. He certainly has some good past samskaras[1].

M. — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Samskaras – he has done good deeds in his past life. One is guileless in one's last life. In that life one experiences the madness of extreme spiritual joy.

"But, do you know what? It is His will. It is by His 'Yea' that everything happens in this world. When He says, 'Nay,' it all comes to a halt.

"Why should one man not bless another? Because nothing happens by man's will. It is by God's will alone that everything happens.

"The other day I went to Captain's house. I saw some young men walking along the road. They were different. There was one nineteen or twenty years old who had parted his hair on the side and he was whistling as he walked along. As he walked, someone said, 'Nagendra! Kshirode!'

"I saw another person steeped in deep tamas. He was whistling – that itself made him rather arrogant. (To Dwija) Why should one who has attained spiritual knowledge be afraid of criticism? His firm and steadfast understanding[2] is like a

[1] Tendencies from past lives
[2] *Kutastha* intellect

blacksmith's anvil – any number of hammer blows does not affect it.

"I saw the father of such-and-such person walking up the road."

M. — He is a very guileless man.

Sri Ramakrishna — But he has red eyes.

Captain's character and Sri Ramakrishna – union of Purusha[1] and Prakriti[2]

Thakur had visited Captain's home – he is talking of this visit. Captain had criticized all the young men who visit Thakur. Perhaps he had been influenced by Hazra.

Sri Ramakrishna — I had a talk with Captain. I told him that there was nothing [in the universe] but Purusha and Prakriti. Narada said, 'Rama, all the men you see are all parts of You and all women are parts of Sita.'

"Captain was very happy to hear this. He said, 'You alone have attained true knowledge. Being parts of Rama, all men are Rama. And being parts of Sita, all women are Sita.'

"No sooner had he said this than he began talking ill of the young men. He said, 'They study English. They eat anything and everything indiscriminately. And these boys visit you regularly

[1] The Self, the Absolute, Spirit. Pure Consciousness, the witness of the changes of Prakriti

[2] Primordial Nature, composed of the gunas, the material of the universe of mind and matter

– this is not good. It can be harmful to you. Hazra is a very special person – a good man. Please don't let these young men visit you so frequently.' At first I said, 'What can I do if they come?'

"Then I gave him a good dressing down. His daughter began to laugh. I said, 'He who has worldly wisdom is very far from the Lord. If a person has no worldliness, the Lord remains in his grip – very close to him indeed.' Speaking of Rakhal, Captain said, 'He eats in anyone's house.' Perhaps he heard it from Hazra. I said to him, 'A man can perform any amount of repetition of the Name and austerities, but if he remains possessed of worldly thoughts, he can never attain God. On the other hand, if a person eats pork but his mind remains attached to the Lord, he is blessed indeed. Such a person gradually attains the Lord – there is no doubt about it. Hazra practices so much repetition of the Name and austerities, but he tries to earn money as a broker while he is practicing!'

"Captain then said, 'True. What you are saying is indeed true.' So I said to him, 'Just a few minutes ago you said that all men were parts of Rama and so they are Rama. And that all women, being parts of Sita, are Sita. And now you say this.'

"Captain said, 'Yes, that is true. But even you do not love everybody.'

"I said, 'Water is God[1]. There is water all around. But one kind of water is used for drinking, the other for bathing, and yet another for washing dirty things. Your wife and daughter who are

[1] Apo Narayana

sitting in front of me are the very personification of the All-Blissful Mother[1].' Captain then said, 'Yes, yes. This is true!' And he proceeded to touch my feet again and again."

Having said this, Thakur begins to laugh. Then he tells how many good qualities Captain has.

Sri Ramakrishna — Captain is a man of many virtues – he regularly performs daily rituals, he himself worships the family deity, he repeats the sacred mantras while taking his bath. How many more devotions Captain observes! He is a great man of ritual – worship, repetition of Name, arati and chanting of sacred hymns – he attends to all these daily devotions.

Captain and learning – Captain and Thakur's state

"I reprimanded Captain. I said, 'You are being messed up by your study of books. Don't read anymore.'

"Captain described my state of being as that of a bird soaring in the firmament. There are these two – the Supreme Soul[2] and the individual soul[3]. The individual soul is like a bird and the Supreme Soul is like the sky, the sky of Consciousness[4]. Captain said, 'Your individual soul soars in the sky of Consciousness and thus you enter into samadhi.' (Smiling) Captain spoke ill of Bengalis. He said, 'Bengalis are blockheads. The gem [meaning Sri

[1] Anandamayi
[2] Paramatman
[3] Jivatman
[4] Chidakasa

Ramakrishna] lives close by but they do not recognize it.' "

Householder devotee and Sri Ramakrishna – how long does one have to practice ritualistic worship[1]?

"Captain's father was a very great devotee. He was a subadar in the British army. He would attend to worship at the proper time. Even on the battlefield, he would worship Shiva with one hand and use a sword and gun with the other.

(To M.) "But you know what? Day and night Captain is engaged in worldly work. Whenever I go to his home, I find him surrounded by his wife and children. Besides, he also has his ledger of accounts open from time to time. Truly, his mind goes to the Lord, but only for a short time. He is like a man suffering from delirium. He remains diseased, though he regains consciousness for awhile. Then he shouts out, 'I want water, I want water to drink!' As soon as he is given water, he goes into delirium again and has no awareness of the outside world. I said to Captain, 'You are a ritualistic worshipper.' Captain said, 'Sir, I feel so much joy in worship and things like that. There is no other way for worldly people but ritualistic worship.'

"I said, 'But does one have to perform ritualistic worship forever? How long does a bee buzz around a flower? As long as it has not alighted on it. It stops buzzing when it sips the honey.' Captain said, 'Can we people, like you, renounce worship and ritualistic devotions?' But he does not

[1] Karma

say the same thing all the time. Sometimes he says that everything is inert, at other times that all is Consciousness. I say, 'Is there anything inert? Everything indeed is Consciousness.' "

Purna and M. – forced marriage and Sri Ramakrishna's opinion

Thakur asks M. about Purna.

Sri Ramakrishna — If I see Purna once more, my yearning to see him will decrease. How intelligent he is! He is greatly attracted to me. He says, 'How my heart, too, longs to see you.' (To M.) His parents have removed him from your school. Will that harm you?

M. — If he (Vidyasagar[1]) says that Purna has been taken away from the school because of me, I have an explanation to give him.

Sri Ramakrishna — What will you say?

M. — I will just say this: Association with the holy enables one to contemplate the Lord. This is not a wrong thing to do, in any respect. In fact, the textbooks the school has prescribed say, 'One must love the Lord with heart and soul.'

Thakur laughs.

Sri Ramakrishna — I sent for the Younger Naren when I was at Captain's house. I asked him, 'Where is your house? Let's go there.' He said, 'Do come,

[1] The founder of the school

please.' But he was nervous when he walked with me, lest his father should know about it. (All laugh.)

(To Akhil's neighbour) "Well, you haven't been here for many days – it may be seven or eight months."

The Neighbour — Yes, sir. It must be a year.

Sri Ramakrishna — A gentleman used to visit with you.

The Neighbour — Yes, sir. Nilmani Babu.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why doesn't he come any more? Ask him to visit me. Please arrange it. (Seeing a child with him) Who is this boy?

The Neighbour — His home is in Assam.

Sri Ramakrishna — Where is Assam? In what direction?

Dwija is talking about Ashu. Ashu's father is going to arrange his marriage, but Ashu doesn't want to marry.

Sri Ramakrishna — Just see, he doesn't want to marry. He is being forced.

Thakur instructs a devotee to show regard for his elder brother, "An elder brother is like one's father. You must give him due consideration and respect."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and essence of Radhika – the essence of birth and death

A pundit is sitting with the devotees. He is from the northwestern region of India.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to M.) — He is a great scholar of the Bhagavata.

M. and the devotees look at the pundit.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the pundit) — Well, what is Yogamaya?

The pundit gives an explanation.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why isn't Radhika called Yogamaya?

The pundit gives a reply to this question. Thakur then explains it himself –

"Radhika is the very embodiment of pure sattvic love, while Yogamaya contains all three qualities – sattva, rajas and tamas. Radhika has nothing but very pure sattva within. (To M.) Narendra now accepts Radha to a great extent. He says, 'If one wants to learn how to love Sat-chit-ananda, he must learn it from Radha.'

"Sat-chit-ananda has Himself created Radha to taste divine bliss. Radha was created from Sat-chit-ananda Krishna. Sat-chit-ananda Krishna Himself is the 'container' and He Himself is the

'contained' in the form of Radha – in order to taste His own Bliss, or to enjoy Bliss by loving Sat-chit-ananda.

"The scriptures of the Vaishnavas say: Radha did not open her eyes after taking birth. In other words, she did not want to see any person other than Krishna. When Yashoda went to see Radhika with Krishna in her arms, Radha opened her eyes to behold Krishna. Being playful, Krishna had placed his hand on Radha's eyes. (To the boy from Assam) Have you seen infants touching others' eyes with their hands?"

Difference between worldly men and pure-souled young men

The pundit takes his leave.

The Pundit — I must go home now.

Sri Ramakrishna (affectionately) — Have you saved any money?

The Pundit — The market is very depressed these days. Employment is not available.

In a few minutes the pundit offers his obeisance to Thakur and leaves.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Just see what a great difference there is between worldly men and these young men [who visit me]! This pundit talks day and night about money. He has come to Calcutta to earn a living. Otherwise, the members of his family will have nothing to live on. That is why he has to

knock on so many doors. When will he get time to meditate on God with a concentrated mind? On the other hand, these young men have no 'lust and greed' in their minds. They can give their minds to God whenever they like.

"These young men do not have attachment for the worldly people. Rakhal used to say at times, 'I feel frightened at the sight of a worldly person approaching me.'

"When I first had spiritual experiences, I used to close the door of my room when I saw a worldly person."

Sorrow at the bereavement of a son or a daughter, and Sri Ramakrishna – his earlier story

"I had such great affection for Ram Mallick in my native village. But when he came here, I couldn't even touch him.

"I was so very fond of him in my childhood. We were together day and night. We used to sleep together. I was sixteen or seventeen years old then. People would say, 'If one of them were a woman, they would marry each other.' We used to play together at his house. I remember all those days. His relatives used to arrive by palanquin. The palanquin men would repeat, '*Hinjoda*! *Hinjoda*[1]!"

"I sent word to him through many people to come see me. He is now running a shop in Chanak. He came here the other day and stayed for two days.

[1] Meaning pull the palanquin with force

"Ram told me, 'I had no child of my own. I brought up my brother's son, but he died.' He heaved a big sigh when he said this. Tears flowed down his cheeks. He has suffered a great loss at the death of his nephew.

"And then he said that because she had no child of her own, his wife gave all her love and affection to the nephew. She was now overwhelmed by grief. I have been telling her, 'You are crazy! What can you gain by grieving? Would you like to go to Kashi?'

"When he called his wife crazy, I found him absolutely 'diluted'. I could not touch him. I could see that there was nothing [no substance] in him."

While Thakur is saying all this in connection with bereavement, the sorrow-stricken brahmin woman stands near the northern door of the room. She is a widow. She had given her only daughter in marriage to a man from an important family. Her daughter's husband, Upadhikari, with the title of Raja, was a resident of Calcutta and a landlord[1]. Whenever the girl visited her paternal home, security men accompanied her. Seeing this, the mother felt very elated. Some days ago that daughter died.

Standing there, the brahmin woman hears the account of the bereavement of Ram Mallick at the death of his nephew. Mad with grief, seeking some relief, she has been running to see Sri Ramakrishna from her home in Baghbazar for many days. She has hoped that Thakur would be able to prescribe some means for overcoming such inconsolable sorrow. Thakur continues –

[1] Zemindar

Sri Ramakrishna (to the brahmin woman and the other devotees) — A fellow came here the other day. He sat for only a short time before he said, 'Let me go now and see my moon-faced[1] son.'

"I couldn't control myself anymore. I said: You fool! Leave this place! Is the face of your son more moon-like than that of the Lord?"

Truth about birth and death – magic of magician

(To M.) "The fact is, God is the Reality and all else is ephemeral. Living beings, the universe, house and home, children and family – they are all the magic of the magician. The magician beats his drum with a stick and cries out, 'See my magic! See this trick!' As soon as he takes the lid off his pot, a number of birds fly out into the sky. Only the magician is real; all his tricks are ephemeral – they are here now, but there is no trace of them in a little while.

"Shiva sits on Mount Kailas with Nandi, his bull, close to him. Suddenly there is a great sound. Nandi, the bull, asks, 'Maharaj, where is the sound coming from?' Shiva says, 'Ravana is born. That is how this sound is produced.' After awhile there is another frightening sound. Nandi asks, 'Now what is this sound?' Shiva laughs and says, 'Ravana has now been slain.' Birth and death are both like the magic of the magician. They are here now and then gone in a little while. Only God is real, all else is ephemeral. Only the water is real, its bubbles are

[1] It is a term of endearment that means lovely and sweet face

only momentary. The bubbles merge in the water, from where they arose.

"God is like a mighty ocean and living beings like bubbles in the ocean – they are born out of it and are dissolved back into it.

"Sons and daughters – they are like five or six small bubbles round a big bubble.

"Indeed, God is the Reality. Now you must endeavour to develop love and devotion[1] for Him and find how to attain Him. What use is your grieving?"

They are all silent. The brahmin woman says, "I must leave now."

Sri Ramakrishna (affectionately) — Are you leaving? The sun is very hot. Why don't you go with them later in the carriage?

It is the last day of the month of Jaishtha, about three or four o'clock. It is very hot. A devotee has brought a new sandalwood fan for Thakur. He is very happy to receive it and exclaims, "Oh, how very nice! Om Tat Sat! Kali!" Saying this, he first fans the deities with it. Then he says to M., "Just see what a fine breeze it generates!" M. thoroughly enjoys it.

[1] Bhakti

Chapter III

The ripe 'I,' or the servant 'I'

Captain has arrived with his sons.

Thakur says to Kishori, "Show them around the temple."

M. speaks to Captain.

M., Dwija and other devotees are sitting on the floor. The teacher from Damdama is there. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller cot facing north. He asks Captain to sit in front of him on one side of the same cot.

Sri Ramakrishna — I told them about you, about your great devotion – so much worship, and about your various kinds of arati.

Captain (shyly) — What worship and arati can I perform? Who am I?

Sri Ramakrishna — The harmful ego is the one that is attached to 'lust and greed'. There is no harm in having the 'I' of a servant of the Lord. Nor is there any harm in a child's 'I' – the child is not subject to any guna (qualities of nature). One moment he fights, and the next he loves. He builds a dollhouse with great care, and then suddenly tears it down. There is no harm in the servant's 'I' or the child's 'I'. This 'I' is not to be counted as ego. Like sugar candy which, though sweet, is not like other sweets. While other sweets bring indigestion, sugar candy brings relief. Or like 'Omkar' – it is not like other sounds.

"It is with this 'ego' that one loves Sat-chit-ananda. The ego cannot be gotten rid of – so one must cling to the 'I of a servant,' or 'I of a devotee.' Otherwise, how can a man live? What love the gopis had! (To Captain) Tell us something about the gopis. You read the Bhagavata a lot."

Captain — Even when Sri Krishna was in Vrindavan and had no riches or splendour, the gopis loved him more than their own hearts and souls. That is why Krishna said, 'How can I repay the debt I owe them – the gopis who have surrendered their all to me – body, mind and soul.'

Sri Ramakrishna is becoming absorbed in ecstasy. Saying, "Govinda, Govinda," he is becoming completely absorbed! He has almost lost outer-consciousness. In wonder, Captain mutters, "How blessed!"

Captain and all the other devotees gather to watch Sri Ramakrishna in this wondrous state of ecstatic love. They sit perfectly still, gazing at him, until he regains normal consciousness.

Sri Ramakrishna — And what after that?

Captain — He [Krishna] is not reached by yogis. It is difficult for even yogis to reach Him[1] – but He is attained by such love as the gopis had. He who was not attained by years of communion by the yogis, the gopis reached effortlessly.

[1] Yogibhiragamyam

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — He ate with the gopis, played with them, cried and demanded much of them – all this He did.

Bankim and biography of Sri Krishna – avatarhood

A devotee says, "Bankim has written a biography of Krishna."

Sri Ramakrishna — Bankim accepts Sri Krishna, but not Radha.

Captain — It seems that he doesn't accept the divine sport of God.

Sri Ramakrishna — And he also says that lust and other passions are necessary.

Teacher from Damdama — Bankim has written in the *Navajivan* (magazine) that the purpose of religion is to energize the physical, mental and spiritual dimensions of man.

Captain — He says that lust and other passions are necessary but he doesn't accept the divine sport of God. God incarnated Himself as a human being in Vrindavan to enact the sport of Radha and Krishna. Why doesn't he accept it?

Avatar is full manifestation of Brahman – difference between mere book-learning and realization

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — The newspaper does not talk of these things. How, then, could he accept such ideas?

"Someone said to his friend, 'Yesterday I was passing though a certain neighbourhood when I saw a house crash to the ground.' The friend said, 'Wait a minute. Let me check the newspaper.' There was no mention in the paper of a building having crashed to the ground. So the fellow said, 'Well, the paper doesn't mention it, so it's of no significance.' The first man said, 'But I saw it myself!' His friend said, 'That might be true, but since it's not in the paper, how can I believe it?' How could Bankim believe that God incarnates as a human being to enact His divine sport? Such ideas aren't in the English education. It is very difficult to comprehend how God fully and perfectly manifests himself in human form. Isn't that true? It is the manifestation of the Infinite in three and a half cubits!"

Captain — One says, 'kṛṣṇastu bhagavān svayam,' – Krishna is God Himself – but you have to use the terms 'whole' and 'partial' manifestation to describe Him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Whole and partial manifestation are like fire and its sparks. An Incarnation of God is for the sake of the devotee and not for the man of knowledge[1]. The Adhyatma Ramayana says: Oh, Rama, You are the all-pervading Spirit and You, Yourself, are everything pervaded. 'vācyavācakabhedena tvameva parameśavara' – Oh Supreme Lord, You are

[1] Jnani

distinguished as the *vachaka*, the signifying symbol, and *vachya*, the object signified.

Captain — The signifying symbol means the pervading Spirit, and the object signified means what is pervaded.

Sri Ramakrishna — The pervaded being, in other words, means a finite form, God incarnating Himself as a human being.

Chapter IV

Egoism is the cause of one's destruction and obstacle in God-realization

Everybody is seated while Sri Ramakrishna talks to Captain and the devotees. Jaygopal Sen and Trailokya of the Brahmo Samaj arrive. They salute Thakur and sit down. Thakur glances at Trailokya and smiles.

Sri Ramakrishna — One does not see God because of one's pride. This stump of a tree of egotism is barring the door of the Lord's room. Unless one jumps over the stump, one cannot enter His room.

"A man had acquired the power to tame ghosts. No sooner did he summon a ghost than it appeared. It said, 'Tell me what work you want me to do. The moment you can't give me any work, I will break your neck.' Whatever work the man had to do, he asked the ghost to do. At last there was no more work to be done. Then the ghost said to the man, 'I will now break your neck.' The man said, 'Wait a minute. I will be right back.' Saying this, he

went to his revered guru. 'Sir, I am in great trouble,' he said, 'what should I do?' The guru said, 'Ask him to straighten this curly hair.' The ghost worked at it day and night. But can tightly curled hair ever be straightened? It remains curly. Egoism also seems to go away for awhile, but it soon returns.

"The Lord's grace does not dawn until one gets rid of egoism.

"When there is a festival in a house, the master of the house appoints a person to be in charge of the store-room. He does not enter it when the person in charge is present. But when the latter leaves the store-room, the master locks it and takes charge of it himself.

"Only a minor is given a guardian. When a child cannot safeguard his wealth and property, the king assumes the responsibility for it on his behalf. Unless one rids oneself of ego, the Lord does not take up one's burdens and responsibilities.

"Once Lord Narayana (Vishnu) and Lakshmi (his consort) were sitting in Vaikuntha. Lakshmi was gently stroking his feet. The Lord suddenly jumped up. Lakshmi asked him, 'Where are you going, Lord?' Narayana said, 'One of my devotees is in great danger. I am going to save him.' Saying this, Narayana went out. But he immediately returned. Lakshmi exclaimed, 'Lord, you have returned so soon!' Narayana laughed and said, 'A devotee overwhelmed with ecstatic love for Me was walking down the road. Washermen were putting out clothes to dry. The devotee trampled the clothes. Seeing it, the washermen came with a stick

to beat him. That is why I went to protect him.' Lakshmi asked, 'But then why have you returned?' Narayana laughed and said, 'I saw the devotee himself picking up a brick to throw at the washermen. (All laugh.) So I didn't have to go save him.' "

His earlier story – Keshab and Gauri – let there be the attitude of a servant after attaining the state of Soham

"I said to Keshab Sen, 'You must get rid of your ego.' Keshab answered, 'But sir, then how would I keep my group together?'

"I said, 'What lack of understanding you have! Please give up the 'unripe I' which attaches you to 'lust and greed'. I am not asking you to give up your 'ripe I,' the 'I of a servant,' or the 'I of a devotee'. 'I am the servant of the Lord,' 'I am the Lord's son' – is the 'ripe I'. There is no harm in it."

Trailokya — It is very difficult to get rid of the ego. A man thinks he has known the highest truth.

Sri Ramakrishna — So that he would not later develop egoism, Gauri would never say, 'I'. Instead he would say, 'this.' I, too, began saying, 'this,' following his example. Instead of saying that I had eaten, I would say, 'This has eaten.' Noticing it, Mathur Babu one day said, 'What is this, my dear sir? Why do you speak like this? Let those people who have egotism do it, but you don't have I-consciousness. There is no need for you to speak in this way.'

"I said to Keshab, 'The ego will not vanish, so one must live with the attitude of a servant, a servant of God. Prahlada had both attitudes. At times he would feel, 'You are I and I am You' – that is, the attitude of 'Soham.' When his sense of I-consciousness would return, he would cherish the idea, 'I am Your servant and You are my Master.' When one has been firmly established in the attitude of 'Soham,' one should later live with the attitude of a servant – as, 'I am the servant of God'."

Signs of having attained the knowledge of Brahman – 'I of a devotee' – renunciation of work

(To Captain) "There are some signs by which one recognizes a person who has attained the knowledge of Brahman. The *Srimad Bhagavata* talks of four states of a man of spiritual knowledge: He appears like (1) a child, (2) an inert object, (3) a crazy man, and (4) a ghoul. Sometimes he acts like a five-year-old child. And sometimes he acts like a mad man.

"At times he lives like an inert object. In this state he cannot attend to work – all work drops off. If you say that Janaka and others did not renounce work, the fact is that in that period of time people used to give their responsibilities to subordinate officers and thus freed themselves of worry. Moreover, people then had intense faith."

Sri Ramakrishna is talking of renunciation of work. Yet he is also saying to those who are attached to duties to attend to them in a detached spirit.

Sri Ramakrishna — After attaining Knowledge one cannot do much work.

Trailokya — Why? Pavhari Baba is such a great yogi, but he settles people's quarrels and disputes. He even decides their lawsuits.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, yes, that's true. Dr. Durgacharan was a great drunkard – he used to drink twenty-four hours a day. But he was precise when he worked. He made no mistakes when treating his patients. There is no harm in attending to work after attaining love and devotion[1] for God. But it is exceedingly difficult – it needs intense practice of spiritual disciplines.

"It is God who does everything. We are only His instruments. The Sikhs said in front of the Kali Temple, 'The Lord is compassionate.' I asked them, 'Compassionate to whom?' The Sikhs said, 'Why, to us, Master.' I said, 'We are all His children. What does compassion to one's own children mean? He looks after His children. If He didn't, are people from the neighbourhood[2] supposed to?' Well, those who call Him compassionate don't understand that we are God's own."

Captain — True, sir. They forget that they are God's own.

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[1] Bhakti
[2] Thakur mentions Vamanpara

The devotee and performing worship and other rituals – God, the gracious loving Lord of the devotees – a perfect jnani

Sri Ramakrishna — Should we not, then, say that God is kind and compassionate? As long as we practice spiritual disciplines, we should call Him compassionate. But when one has realized God, one rightly feels that He is one's own Father or Mother. As long as one has not realized God, one feels distant from Him – like somebody else's child.

"During the stage of practicing spiritual disciplines, one should describe God by all of His attributes. One day Hazra said to Narendra, 'God is infinite, so is His splendour. Does He care to eat your sandesh or banana? Does He want to listen to your songs? These are all illusions of the mind.'

"Narendra immediately fell down ten cubits [spiritually]. I said to Hazra, 'What a scoundrel you are! If you talk to youngsters like this, what will they do?' Once a man loses love and devotion for God[1], what remains for him to live by? God has infinite splendour, yet He is under the control of His devotee. The gate-keeper of a rich man comes to a meeting of the master and his friends; he stands on one side of the room. He has something in his hand covered with a piece of cloth. He is very hesitant. The master asks him, 'What is the matter, gate-keeper? What do you have in your hand?' The gate-keeper places a custard apple before the master hesitantly and says to him, 'I wish for you to eat it.' The master, touched by the devotion and

[1] Bhakti

feelings of the gate-keeper, takes the custard apple with great reverence and says, 'Ah! It is a custard apple of such good quality! Where did you get it? You must have taken a great deal of trouble to find it!'

"God is under the control of His devotee. Duryodhana showed great love and respect for Sri Krishna and said, 'Please stay here and have your meal.' The Lord, however, went to Vidur's cottage. He is the gracious, loving Lord of the devotees. He ate Vidur's simple rice and vegetables as if they were ambrosia.

"A perfect jnani has this sign – he sometimes behaves like a ghoul. He doesn't care what he eats or drinks, he doesn't discriminate between purity and impurity. In fact, the perfect jnani and the absolutely crazy person may look alike externally. The perfect jnani might not recite the holy mantras while taking a dip in the Ganges. He may have placed all the flowers indiscriminately at the feet of the deity while performing worship and left without uttering any sacred mantras."

Man of karma and Sri Ramakrishna – how long does one have to perform work?

"As long as one craves worldly enjoyment, one cannot renounce work. One has to perform work as long as one desires pleasure.

"A bird sat absent-mindedly on the mast of a ship. The ship was sailing on the Ganges until it finally reached the mighty ocean. The bird then came to its senses. It looked all around and could see no landmark or shore. It flew toward the north,

hoping to reach land. Having flown a long distance, it grew tired, but could still see no landmark. What could it do? It returned to the ship and sat on the mast again.

"After some time the bird flew away again – this time toward the east. It couldn't see anything in the east either – there was only a vast sheet of water. It became extremely tired and again returned to the mast of the ship and perched there. After resting for a long time, it went to the south and then to the west. When it found no sign of land anywhere, it sat on the mast again and flew no more. It sat there peacefully. Now it had no feeling of urgency, restlessness, or anxiety in its mind. Being at peace, it made no more effort to fly."

Captain — Ah, what a nice illustration!

One develops deep longing for God when desire for worldly pleasures has ceased – it leads to God-realization

Sri Ramakrishna — Worldly people become exhausted after wandering around in all directions seeking happiness. When attached to 'lust and greed' they only suffer pain and grief. Then they develop dispassion[1] and renunciation. Most people cannot renounce unless they have enjoyed the pleasures of the world. There are two kinds of spiritual aspirants: *kutichaka* and *vahudaka*. Religious aspirants of the latter class visit numerous places of pilgrimage – they cannot settle at one place for any length of time. They drink the

[1] Vairagya

water from many different holy places. When their restlessness ceases by constant roaming about, they build themselves a hut and settle down. Then they meditate on God free from worry and effort.

"What is there in the world to enjoy? 'Lust and greed' only bring momentary pleasures. One moment there is pleasure, the next it is no more.

"The world is like a cloudy sky pouring rain; generally one cannot see the sun. There is sorrow the greater part of life. The clouds of 'lust and greed' do not let one see the sun.

"Some people ask me, 'Sir, why has the Lord created such a world? Is there no way out for us?' "

The way – yearning and renunciation

"I say, why shouldn't there be a way? Take refuge in God and pray to Him with a yearning heart for a favourable breeze to give you an auspicious opportunity. God definitely listens to the prayers of one who calls on Him with a longing heart.

"The son of a man was critically ill. His father went to various people asking with great yearning for a remedy. Somebody said, 'He will be cured if you can arrange this: That the water of the svati nakshatra[1] fall into a skull; that a frog drink that water; that a snake chase and pounce upon the frog; that the venom of the snake falls into the skull as the frog escapes its bite. If you give a little of that poison water to the patient, he should get well.'

[1] A particular conjunction of stars

"With great longing this fellow set out in search of the medicine during the svati constellation of stars. It was raining. He implored the Lord longingly, 'Lord, please let me locate a skull. It is raining during the svati constellation of stars.' Then he added to his prayer, 'I appeal to you, Oh Savior. Grant that I may also find a frog and a snake.' He had such great yearning that he found them all immediately. In no time the snake chased the frog. As it was going to bite the frog, its poison fell into the skull.

"If you surrender to the Lord and call on Him with a heart full of yearning, He is bound to listen and take care of everything for you."

Captain — What an illustration!

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, God does make everything favourable. It may be possible that one is not married and so is able to devote his entire mind to the Lord. Or perhaps his brother begins to earn (money), or his son grows up, so that he is relieved of household responsibilities. In that case he can effortlessly give one hundred percent of his mind to God. But without renouncing 'lust and greed,' one does not succeed. It is only by renunciation that ignorance[1] is dispelled. When the rays of the sun fall on a lens, many objects burn. On the other hand, if you take the lens inside a room where there is no sunlight, nothing is burned – you have to come out of the room to use the lens.

[1] Ajnana

One can enter household life after realizing God, like Janaka and others

"Some people lead householder lives after attaining spiritual knowledge. They are able to see both the inside and outside of the room. The light of spiritual knowledge illumines the household, by virtue of which they can discriminate between what is good and what is bad, what is eternal and what is ephemeral.

"The ignorant who live in the world without having faith in God are like people living in a house made of mud walls. They can see only a little of the inside of the house in its dim light. But those who live a householder's life after attaining spiritual knowledge, having realized God, are like people living in a house made of glass. They can see both inside and outside the house. The light of the sun of Knowledge lights up the inside of the house well. Such a man sees everything inside the house very clearly – what is good and what is bad, what is permanent and what is transitory.

"God is the only doer, we are just His instruments.

"That is why the jnani should also be free from ego. The author of *Mahimastava*[1] was proud to have written this hymn. But his pride was crushed when Shiva's bull bared his teeth. He saw that each one of its teeth was one of the sacred verses[2] written by him. Do you know what this means? All

[1] A hymn to Lord Shiva
[2] Mantras

sacred verses have existed since eternity – he had only brought them to light.

"It is not good to be a professional guru. One cannot become a religious teacher without receiving a command from God. He who says that he is a guru is a man of low intelligence. Haven't you noticed the pans of a weighing scale? The pan that is lighter goes higher. The person who considers himself higher is, in fact, lighter [of lesser substance]. Everyone wants to be a guru – a disciple is hard to find."

Trailokya is sitting on the floor toward the northern side of the smaller cot. He is going to sing a devotional song. Sri Ramakrishna says, "Ah, how nicely you sing!" Trailokya sings to the accompaniment of a tanpura –

Song –

We have given our hearts to You; You indeed are everything that exists.

Song –

You are my everything, O Lord! The support of my life and its quintessence.

But for You there is none in the three worlds whom I can call my own.

Listening to the song, Thakur is becoming overwhelmed with divine ecstasy. He says, "Ah! Ah! You indeed are everything that exists."

The song ends. It is six o'clock. Thakur goes toward the Jhautala for a wash. M. accompanies him.

Thakur laughs and talks while he is walking along. Suddenly he says to M., "Oh, you people have not eaten anything! None of you have!"

Sri Ramakrishna is eager to serve prasad to the devotees.

Narendra and Sri Ramakrishna

Thakur is going to Calcutta in the evening. Returning from the Jhautala, he says to M., "In whose carriage will I go to Calcutta?"

It is evening. A lamp is lighted in Thakur's room and incense is burned. Lamps have also been lit everywhere in the temples and buildings. A symphony of sanai and other instruments is being played. Arati will now be performed in the twelve Shiva temples, in the Vishnu temple, and in Mother Kali's temple.

Sitting on the smaller cot, Sri Ramakrishna chants the name of the deities and then meditates on the Divine Mother. The evening worship is over. Thakur begins pacing up and down the room, occasionally talking with the devotees. He consults M. about his visit to Calcutta.

Narendra arrives, accompanied by Sarat and one or two other young devotees. Lying prostrate on the ground, they salute Thakur.

Seeing Narendra, Thakur's heart overflows with love and affection. Touching Narendra's face as one would a child's, he caresses him and says affectionately, "Ah, you have come!"

Thakur stands in the middle of the room facing west. Narendra and the other young men salute him and sit facing east in front of him. They talk. Turning to M. Thakur says, "Should we go to Calcutta, now that Narendra has come? I sent someone to fetch him. Should we go then? What do you think?"

M. — Whatever you wish. Let's not go today.

Sri Ramakrishna — All right. I'll go tomorrow – if not by boat, then by carriage. (To the other devotees) It is already dark. You may leave now.

The devotees salute Thakur one by one and leave.

Section XVIII

Sri Ramakrishna at Devotees' Homes in Calcutta

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at Balaram's house

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in Balaram's parlour with the devotees. It is about three o'clock in the afternoon. He is smiling. Binode, Rakhal, M. and a few others are sitting near him. The Younger Naren arrives.

It is Tuesday, 28 July 1885, the first lunar day of the dark fortnight of the month of Ashada. Thakur had come to Balaram's house in the morning and had taken his midday meal there with the devotees. Sri Jagannath Deva is the deity worshipped at Balaram's house, so Thakur says that the food at Balaram's house is very pure.

Narayan and some other devotees had told Sri Ramakrishna that there were several pictures of gods and goddesses at Nanda Bose's house. Thakur is going there this afternoon to see the pictures. A brahmin woman[1] devoted to Sri Ramakrishna lives near Nanda Bose's house. The brahmin woman, deeply afflicted with sorrow at the death of her daughter, occasionally visits him at Dakshineswar. She has invited Thakur with intense longing to visit her house. Thakur will visit her, as well as the home of Ganu's mother, another devotee.

Whenever Thakur comes to Balaram's house, he sends word to the young boy devotees to come there to see him. He sends the message through other

[1] Golap-ma (Golap Sundari Devi), a companion and friend of Holy Mother

devotees. Once the Younger Naren said to Sri Ramakrishna, "I am so busy with work, I can't always come to see you. I have to study for my examinations." When the Younger Naren arrives, Thakur talks to him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Younger Naren) — I didn't send for you today.

The Younger Naren (laughing) — What can be done about it now?

Sri Ramakrishna — I don't want your studies to suffer. You should come to see me when you are free.

Thakur says this as though he were annoyed with a loved one.

The palanquin has arrived. Thakur will now go to Nanda Bose's house.

Chanting the name of the Lord, he gets into the palanquin. He is wearing black, varnished slippers and a red-bordered dhoti. He has no shawl. Mani places the slippers on one side of the palanquin and walks along with it on foot. Paresh soon joins him.

The palanquin enters the gate of Nanda Bose's house. Crossing its spacious courtyard, the palanquin stops in front of the residence.

Some members of the family come and salute Thakur. Thakur asks M. to give him the slippers. Then he gets out of the palanquin and goes to the hall on the upper floor. It is a very spacious room. Pictures of gods and goddesses hang on all sides.

The master of the house and his brother, Pasupati, talk with Thakur. After some time the devotees who had followed the palanquin join them in the hall. Atul, Girish's brother, is there, as well as

Prasanna's father, who is a frequent visitor to Nanda's house.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna's gracious visit to the house of Nanda Bose

Sri Ramakrishna gets up to look at the pictures of gods and goddesses. M. and many other devotees stand around him. Pasupati, Nanda's brother, accompanies him and explains the pictures.

Thakur first sees the picture of Vishnu with four arms. As soon as he sees it, he is overwhelmed with divine ecstasy. He had been standing, but now he sits down. He remains absorbed in this spiritual mood for some time.

The second picture is of the gracious and loving Lord of the devotees, Sri Ramachandra.

Sri Rama, placing his hand on Hanuman's head, is blessing him. Hanuman's eyes are fixed on Sri Rama's lotus feet. Sri Ramakrishna gazes at this image for a long time. Full of divine emotion, he says, "Ah! Ah!"

The third picture is of Sri Krishna standing with a flute to his lips under the kadamba tree.

The fourth picture is of Vamana[1] with an umbrella over his head, going to Bali's yajna. Sri Ramakrishna utters, "Vamana," and then fixes his eyes on him.

Having seen the picture of Narasimha[2], Thakur looks at one of Sri Krishna in the cow pasture. He is tending his cows with his cowherd friends on the bank of the Jamuna at Vrindavan.

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[1] Vamana, the dwarf – an incarnation of Vishnu

[2] God incarnated as half lion and half man to protect Prahlada

Mani exclaims, "Oh, a very nice picture!"

Seeing the seventh picture, Thakur says, "Dhumavati." The eighth is of Shorashi; the ninth of Bhuvaneshvari; the tenth of Tara and the eleventh of Kali. Thakur says, "All these pictures depict the terrible aspects of the Divine Mother. They should not be kept at home, but if they are, they should be worshipped. You are very fortunate to be able to keep them in your house."

Looking at the picture of Mother Annapurna, Thakur says in an ecstatic mood, "Grand! Grand!"

The next painting is of Radha dressed as a king. She is seated on a throne in the nikunja grove surrounded by her milkmaid friends [as attendants]. Sri Krishna is standing at the gate of the grove dressed as a gatekeeper.

Then there is a picture of the festival in which Sri Krishna is swung in a cradle[1]. Thakur looks at the next for a long time – it is the image of Saraswati[2] inside a glass case. The goddess is holding a vina[3] and singing raga and ragini[4] in ecstasy.

Having seen the pictures, Thakur goes back to the master of the house and says to him, "We have had such joy today. Grand! You are a real and devout Hindu. Instead of keeping English pictures, you have these. How surprising!"

Nanda Bose is seated. He says respectfully to Thakur, "Please sit down. Why are you standing?"

Sri Ramakrishna (sitting) — These are very important pictures. You are a real Hindu.

Nanda Bose — I have European pictures too.

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[1] Dol
[2] Vinapani, the goddess of learning and music
[3] A stringed musical instrument
[4] An Indian musical mode

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — But they are different. You haven't the same attitude toward European pictures.

A picture of Keshab Sen's Navavidhan is hanging on one wall of the room. Suresh Mitra had had it painted. He is one of Thakur's beloved disciples. In this picture the Paramahamsa Deva is showing Keshab the followers of different religions going toward God on different paths – the difference is only in paths.

Sri Ramakrishna — Ah! This picture was painted for Surendra[1].

Prasanna's Father (smiling) — You, too, are in the picture.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — It is a unique portrait; it contains all the beliefs. It is an ideal for modern times.

While speaking, Thakur is suddenly becoming absorbed in divine ecstasy. He talks to the Mother of the Universe.

After awhile he says, as if intoxicated, "I am not unconscious." Looking around the house, he says, "It is a big building. But what is in it? Bricks, wood and clay."

In a few minutes he says, "I am so happy to see all these pictures of gods and goddesses." Then he adds, "Images of the terrible aspects of the Divine Mother – Kali, or Tara (the consort of Shiva who lives in the cremation ground among corpses) – should not

[1] The name by which Thakur addressed Suresh Mitra

be kept in a household. If you do, they must be worshipped."

Pasupati (smiling) — It will be as long as He wills it.

Sri Ramakrishna — Of course that's true. But it is good to keep the mind on God. It is not good to forget Him.

Nanda Bose — But one does not want to think of Him!

Sri Ramakrishna — One thinks of Him by His grace.

Nanda Bose — But God does not seem to grant His grace. Does He have the power to bestow grace?

Is God indeed the doer – or is the work itself God?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — I see, you think like the pundits do – one reaps the fruit of one's actions. Give up this idea. By taking refuge in the Lord, one's duties and karmas cease to exist. Taking flowers in my hand, I used to say to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, here is Your sin and here Your holy deeds. I want neither; pray grant me pure love and devotion. Here is Your good and here Your evil. I want neither good nor evil; pray grant me pure love and devotion. Here is Your righteousness, here Your unrighteousness. I want neither of them; pray grant me pure love and devotion. Here is Your Knowledge, here is Your ignorance. I want neither knowledge nor ignorance; pray grant me pure love

and devotion. Here is Your purity, here Your impurity. Pray grant me pure love and devotion.'

Nanda Bose — Can God change the law?

Sri Ramakrishna — What do you mean? He is the Lord of all – He can do anything and everything. He who has made the law can change it.

Does awakening come when one has done away with worldly enjoyments, or is it by His grace?

"But you can talk that way. Since you crave worldly enjoyments, you may say so. There is a view that a man doesn't attain spiritual awakening until his desire for worldly enjoyments is over. But what is there to enjoy? The pleasures of 'lust and greed' are momentary – this moment they exist and the next moment they disappear. What is there in 'lust and greed'? Its enjoyment is like eating a hog-plum that is all stone and rind. Eat it and you get colic. The moment you swallow sweet sandesh, it is gone."

Is God partial? Why is there ignorance? It is His sweet will

Nanda Bose is silent for a few minutes. Then he says, "Oh yes! People no doubt talk that way. But is God partial? If one can succeed by His grace, it is obvious that He is partial."

Sri Ramakrishna — God Himself has become everything. He Himself has become living beings, the universe – everything. When one attains

Absolute Knowledge[1] one realizes this. He has become the mind, the intellect, the body – and the twenty-four cosmic principles. To whom, then, can He be partial?

Nanda Bose — Why has He taken so many forms? Why is there knowledge in one place and ignorance in another?

Sri Ramakrishna — It is His sweet will.

Atul — Kedar (Chatterji) said something nice. Somebody asked him, 'Why did God create the world?' He replied, 'I was not present at the meeting in which He planned His creation.' (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna — It is God's will.

Saying this, Thakur sings –

All is Your will, O Mother Tara! You have Your own way in doing everything!

You do Your works, O Mother! People, however, say that they do it.

You bind the elephant in the mud, and You make the lame cross the hills.

To some You grant the seat of Brahman, and others You take down,

I am the instrument, You are the operator; I am the dwelling, You are the dweller within.

I am the chariot, You are the Charioteer; I move as You make me move.

I speak as You make me speak.

[1] Purna jnana

"She is the All-Blissful Mother. She creates, preserves and dissolves in Her sport. There are numberless beings, but only one or two of them attain salvation – that alone makes Her happy. 'She claps and laughs when She sees one or two kites out of millions breaking free of their strings.' Likewise, some people are being entangled in the world and some are being liberated.

> "In the sea of the world, so many boats, O mind, sail, while others sink."

Nanda Bose — That is Her sweet will. But what about us, who are suffering so much?

Sri Ramakrishna — Do 'you' really exist? It is She who has become everything. As long as one does not know Her, one goes on repeating, 'I, I.'

"Everyone will know Her – everyone will indeed be liberated. Some people get their meal in the morning, others at midday and yet others in the evening – but no one will remain hungry. Indeed, everyone will realize his own true nature."

Pasupati — True, sir. It seems that He Himself has become everything.

Sri Ramakrishna — Just try to find out what you are. Are you bones and flesh, or blood, or the intestines? Looking for 'I', you find 'You' – in other words, there is nothing inside you but God's power. There is no 'I', only 'You'. You have so much wealth, but you have no egotism. It is not possible to get rid of 'I' altogether. So if the 'I' does not vanish, let the rascal remain as the servant of God. (All laugh.) It

is good to have the pride of being a devotee of God, or His son, or the servant of God. The 'I' which is attached to 'lust and greed' is the 'unripe I'. One must renounce such an ego.

Hearing such a clear elucidation of egoism, the master of the house and the others are delighted.

Pride of wealth and self-forgetfulness

Sri Ramakrishna — There are two signs of a person who has attained spiritual knowledge. First, he has no pride; second, he develops a serene attitude. You have both these signs, so you must have received the grace of God.

"When one has too much wealth, one forgets God. That is the nature of wealth. Jadu Mallick has become very wealthy. He doesn't talk much about God these days. Earlier he used to speak so nicely about the Lord.

" 'Lust and greed' are a kind of intoxicant. When one is drunk, one fails to recognize one's own maternal and paternal uncles. One may even say to them, 'Cursed be your family...' A drunkard can't distinguish between his superiors and inferiors."

Nanda Bose — That is true.

Theosophy – salvation through momentary communion with God – practicing pure love and devotion

Pasupati — Sir, what do you think about Spiritualism and Theosophy? And about the solar world and the lunar world and the world of planets?

Sri Ramakrishna — I don't know, my dear. But why worry about all these calculations? Eat mangoes. What is the use of knowing how many mango trees, how many branches, how many millions of leaves are in the garden? I have come to the garden to eat mangoes. Let me eat and go.

"A man has no desire to know all these useless details when he develops spiritual awakening, when he knows God. In delirium what nonsense one speaks: 'I shall eat five seers of cooked rice. I shall drink a pitcher of water.' The physician says to such a patient, 'Yes, yes, you want all this. All right, you may eat it.' Saying which, the physician goes on with his smoke. But he listens to the patient when he is no longer delirious."

Pasupati — Our delirium might last forever!

Sri Ramakrishna — Why? Fix your mind on God. You will attain spiritual awakening.

Pasupati (smiling) — Our communion with God is momentary – no longer than the time it takes to smoke. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna — So what. Even a momentary communion with God gives liberation.

"Ahalya said, 'Rama, may I be born as the offspring of a pig, or any other being, but pray grant that I may fix my mind at Thy lotus feet and develop pure love and devotion for Thee.'

"Narada said, 'Rama, I want no other boon from You. Only grant pure love and devotion. And

may I never be enchanted by Your world-bewitching maya. Pray, bless me.' When one sincerely prays to Him, one can fix one's mind on Him – then one does develop pure love and devotion at His lotus feet."

Sin and the after-life – thought of God at the time of death – King Bharata

" 'Shall we ever get rid of our delirium? What will happen to us? We are sinners' – one must give up such ideas. (To Nanda Bose) Let there be this faith: Since I have called on the name of Rama, how can there be any sin in me?"

Nanda Bose — Does an after-life exist? Is one punished for one's sins?

Sri Ramakrishna — Why don't you eat mangoes! What need do you have to calculate all these things – does an after-life exist or not? What use is it to talk about such things?

"Please eat mangoes. 'Mango,' or love and devotion for God, is the one thing essential."

Nanda Bose — Where are mango trees? Where can I get them?

Sri Ramakrishna — Trees? He exists as the eternal and infinite Brahman. He does exist, He is permanent. The fact is that He is the wish-fulfilling tree[1] of heaven.

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[1] *Kalpataru*

O my mind, pick up the four fruits from under the wish-fulfilling tree of Kali.

"You must go to the wish-fulfilling tree and pray to it. Then alone can you obtain the fruit – then only will the fruit fall to the ground. You can then gather it and bring it with you. The four fruits are: righteousness, economic security, fulfillment of legitimate desires and liberation[1].

"Jnanis seek the fruit of liberation and devotees want love and devotion for God – love for God that wells up unbidden out of the depths of the immortal soul. They are not interested in righteousness, economic security and fulfillment of desires.

"You ask about the after-life. According to the *Gita*, one becomes what one thinks of at the hour of death. King Bharata quit his mortal frame remorsefully repeating, 'Deer, deer' because he was grieving over his pet deer. So he was born as a deer in the next birth. For this reason, day and night one should practice repetition of the Name[2], meditation, worship and other spiritual exercises. Only then, by virtue of practice, will one think of the Lord at the hour of death. That is how one attains the real nature of God after death.

"Keshab Sen also asked me about the after-life. I said to him too, 'What need have you for all these calculations?' And I added, 'As long as one does not realize God, one has to repeatedly come to this world.' A potter dries his earthen pots and lids by putting them in the sun. If they are trampled by

[1] *Dharma, artha, kama and moksha*
[2] *Japa*

goats or sheep, he throws away the baked and broken pots. However, he mixes the unbaked ones with more clay and moulds them again into new vessels on the potter's wheel."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and his blessings on a householder – signs of rajas

The master of the house has shown no sign of offering refreshments to Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna himself mentions it, saying –

"Let's have something to eat. I said to Jadu's mother the other day, 'Look here, please offer me something to eat.' Otherwise, it brings harm to the family."

The master of the house orders some sweets. Thakur eats them. Nanda Bose and the others look intently at him. They notice how Sri Ramakrishna conducts himself.

Sri Ramakrishna now wishes to wash his hands. The sweets had been on a plate placed on a sheet on the carpet, so he could not wash his hands on it. A servant brings a brass bowl for him to use.

The brass bowl is a sign of rajas. Thakur exclaims, "Please take it away." The master of the house says to him, "Please wash your hands."

Thakur is preoccupied with some other thought. He asks, "What? Do I have to wash my hands?"

Thakur rises and goes to the southern verandah. He asks Mani to pour water on his hands. Mani does so from a pitcher with a spout. Sri

Ramakrishna dries his hand with his own cloth and returns to his seat. Some betel leaves have been brought on a platter for the gentleman guests. Thakur does not take it when a betel leaf from this platter, which had already been offered to the other guests, is offered to him.

Offering food ritualistically to one's ideal deity – love and devotion for God mixed with knowledge, and pure love

Nanda Bose (to Sri Ramakrishna) — May I ask you something?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What?

Nanda Bose — Why didn't you take the betel leaf? Everything else went fine, but you seemed unreasonable about that.

Sri Ramakrishna — I take food only after offering it to God.

Nanda Bose —But it would have been eaten by God!

Sri Ramakrishna — The path of jnana is one and the path of love and devotion for God[1] another. The school of jnana evaluates everything by applying the knowledge of Brahman[2]. In the path of love and devotion, one differentiates a little.

Nanda Bose — But you did not act correctly.

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[1] Bhakti

[2] The jnani believes in Oneness of God in all objects and does not distinguish between holy and unholy

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — That is my own particular attitude. What you say is also right.

Thakur is cautioning the master of the house about flatterers.

Sri Ramakrishna — Here is one particular caution. Your courtier friends hover around you for their own selfish ends. (To Prasanna's father) Do you live here?

Prasanna's Father — No sir, I live in the neighbourhood. Would you care for a smoke?

Sri Ramakrishna (humbly) — No, you may smoke. I don't feel like smoking.

Nanda Bose has a very big house. That is why Thakur says to him, "Jadu's house is not this big. I told him so the other day."

Nanda Basu — He has built a new house at Jorashanko.

Thakur now encourages Nanda Bose.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Nanda Bose) — It is not a small matter that, though living in the world, you have kept your mind on God. Those who have renounced the world do have to call on God – what bravery is there in that? He indeed is blessed who calls on Him though living in the world. Such a person has to remove a twenty maund stone to be able to find something.

"One should take recourse to a particular attitude when calling upon God. Hanuman had the attitude of bhakti mixed with knowledge, Narada had pure love and devotion for God.

"Rama asked Hanuman, 'Hanuman, what is your attitude when you worship me?' Hanuman said, 'Sometimes I see that You are the whole and I a part of You. At other times, I see that You are the Master and I am Your servant. And Rama, when I have the knowledge of Absolute Truth, I see that You are I and I am You.'

"Rama said to Narada, 'Please ask me for a boon.' Narada said, 'Rama, please grant only that I may have pure love and devotion for Your lotus feet and that I may never be enchanted by Your world-bewitching maya.' "

Thakur now wishes to leave.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Nanda Bose) — According to the *Gita*, the person who is recognized as great by the world has a special power of God in him. You have divine power.

Nanda Bose — All people are endowed with equal power.

Sri Ramakrishna (irritated) — All of you people have just this one thing to say! Can all people have equal power? Though it is the same Omnipresent God[1] who is present in every being, the

[1] *Vibhu*

manifestation of His powers are different in different beings.

"Vidyasagar also said the same thing, 'Has God given more power to some and less to others?' I said in reply, 'If there was no difference between power in different people, why should we come to see you? Have you grown two horns on your head?' "

Thakur now rises, as do the devotees. Pasupati gets up and accompanies them to the door.

Section XIX

Sri Ramakrishna at Devotees' Homes in Calcutta

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at the home of a grief-stricken brahmin woman[1]

Thakur arrives in Baghbazar, to an old brick house belonging to a grieving brahmin woman. Upon entering, there is a cowshed to the left. There is space on the roof for sitting. Here, people have formed rows, some standing, while others are seated. They are all eager to have a glimpse of Sri Ramakrishna.

The brahmin woman and her sister are widows. Their brothers also live in the house with their families. The brahmin woman has suffered inconsolable grief at the loss of her only daughter. She has been hard at work the whole day in preparation for Thakur's setting his holy feet in her home. While Thakur was at Nanda Bose's house, she had been going in and out of her house anxiously awaiting his arrival. Thakur had told her that he would come to her house after visiting Nanda Bose. Because he was delayed, she wondered if he would come at all.

Thakur sits with the devotees on the roof, where seating arrangements have been made. M., Narayan, Jogen Sen, Devendra and Jogin sit close to him on a mat. Soon the Younger Naren and many other devotees join them. The brahmin woman's sister comes to the roof and offers salutations to Thakur, saying, "My sister has just gone to Nanda

[1] Golap-ma (Golap Sundari Devi), a companion and friend of Holy Mother

Bose's house to find out why there is so much delay in your coming. She will return soon."

Hearing a sound downstairs, she says, "It is my sister coming." She looked for her, but the sister had not yet returned.

Thakur is smiling, sitting there surrounded by devotees.

M. (to Devendra) — What a wonderful sight! Young and old, men and women, all standing in rows, eager to see Sri Ramakrishna and hear his words.

Devendra (to Sri Ramakrishna) — M. says that this place is better than Nanda Bose's. How great is their love and devotion for God!

Thakur laughs.

Now the brahmin woman's sister says, "Here comes sister!"

The brahmin woman comes and salutes Thakur. Then she is unable to decide what to say or do.

Beside herself with emotion, she says, "Oh my dear, I am not going to survive this joy. All of you, please tell me how I can save myself! When my Chandi [daughter] visited me, she was accompanied by armed men to guard her on the road. Even then I didn't feel such joy as now. I don't feel the least grief at Chandi's death. I was afraid that he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] would not come and I had decided to throw everything I had prepared into the Ganges. And I wouldn't speak to him any more. I would only go once where he visited and see him from a distance, then I would return home."

"Let me go and tell everybody, 'Come! Come! See my joy!' Let me show Jogin how fortunate I am!"

Still overwhelmed with joy, the brahmin woman says, "Sir, a labourer paid a rupee for a lottery ticket and won a hundred thousand rupees. The moment he heard that he had won all that money, he died of joy. He really died. It is the same with me. Please bless me, friends, or I will surely die."

Seeing her intense joy and ecstatic state, M. is fascinated. He goes to take the dust of her feet. "What are you doing?" she exclaims. Instead, she salutes M.

The brahmin woman is delighted to see the devotees in her home. She says, "I am glad to see all of you here. I have brought the Younger Naren. I said to him, 'Without you, who would make us laugh?' " While she was talking, her sister came and said anxiously, "Come, sister. How can you keep standing there? Come downstairs. How can I manage by myself?"

The brahmin woman is absorbed in joy. She looks at Thakur and the devotees. How can she leave them and go downstairs?

After some conversation, full of devotion, she takes Thakur to another room and offers him sweets and other refreshments. The devotees also have refreshments on the roof.

It is about 8:00 p.m. and Thakur is ready to leave. One goes west through a room downstairs to a verandah in the courtyard. With the cowshed on the right, one comes to the main gate. When Thakur goes with the devotees through the verandah toward the main gate, the brahmin woman calls out, "I say, sister-in-law, come quickly and take the dust of his feet!" Both the brahmin woman's sister-in-law and one of her brothers salute Sri Ramakrishna.

The brahmin woman says to Thakur, "This is one of my brothers. He is a fool!"

Sri Ramakrishna — No, no. They are all good people.

A person shows the path with a lantern, but some places are not sufficiently lit.

The Younger Naren calls out loudly, "Bring the light here! Show the light here! You haven't lit the path well enough." (All laugh.)

At the cowshed, the brahmin woman says to Thakur, "This is my house for cows." Thakur stops for awhile in front of the cowshed. The devotees are all around him. Mani prostrates before Thakur to salute him and takes the dust of his feet.

Thakur will now visit Ganu's mother[1].

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna at the home of Ganu's mother

Sri Ramakrishna is seated in the living room of Ganu's mother's house. It is on the ground floor. Next to the street, it is used as a concert room. Several young men now and then play music for Thakur's entertainment.

It is half past eight in the evening. It is the first day of the dark fortnight of the month of Ashada. The sky, the house and the main road are all bathed in moonlight. The devotees had come in with Thakur and taken their seats in the room.

The brahmin woman, who has accompanied them, first goes inside the house and then comes and stands at the door of the living room. A number of boys from the neighbourhood look at Thakur through its windows. When they hear of his arrival, people of

[1] Yogin-ma (Yogindra Mohini Biswas), Holy Mother's confidant and friend

the neighborhood, young and old, come eagerly to see the great saint.

Seeing more and more boys peeping in from the windows, the Younger Naren says, "I say, why are you all here? Go home, please." But Sri Ramakrishna says affectionately, "No, no. Please stay."

From time to time Thakur chants, "Hari Om! Hari Om!"

An asana has been placed over an ordinary cotton carpet. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on it. Some young musicians who have brought their instruments are asked to sing some songs. When they can't find comfortable seats, Thakur asks them to sit close to him on the cotton carpet.

He says, "Why don't you sit here? Here, I am making room." Saying this, he gathers up his asana. The boys sing –

Song –

O Keshab, wandering in the groves and glades, bestow Your grace on this distressed soul.

O Madhava, charmer of the mind, holding a magic flute.

(Say Haribol, Haribol, Haribol, O my mind)

You are the youth of Vraja, the tamer of Kalia and the dispeller of the fear of the distressed.

With eyes askance, the peacock feather aslant in the crest, the charmer of Radha's heart.

The lifter of Mount Govardhan, bedecked with sylvan flowers, O Damodar, the destroyer of the pride of Kamsa.

O Shyam, sporting and dancing with the gopis!

(Say Haribol, Haribol, Haribol, O my mind)

Song –

Come, O mother Uma, my life...

Sri Ramakrishna — Oh, what a great song! What a nice violin! How well it was played!

One of the young men played the flute. Thakur points to him and the other young man with his finger and says, "They make a nice pair."

The concert continued. Pleased with the music, Thakur says, "How nice! Beautiful indeed!"

Pointing to one young man, he says, "He can play all the instruments."

Then he says to M., "They are all good people."

When the song is over, Thakur says to the devotees, "You sing some songs, too." The brahmin woman is standing near the door. She says, "None of them can sing – except perhaps Mahima Babu. But he won't sing in front of him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna]."

The Young Man — Why? I even sing before my father.

The Younger Naren (laughing loudly) — But he has not advanced that far.

Everyone laughs. In a few minutes the brahmin woman comes and says, "Please come inside." Sri Ramakrishna asks, 'Why?"

The Brahmin Woman — Refreshments are to be served there. Kindly go inside.

Sri Ramakrishna — Why don't you bring them here?

The Brahmin Woman — Ganu's mother says, "If he once gives the dust of his feet in the house, it will

turn into Kashi. Then even dying in the house will no longer be a problem for me."

Sri Ramakrishna enters the inner apartments with the brahmin woman and the young men. The devotees pace up and down in the moonlight. M. and Binode talk to one another as they stroll the main path south of the house.

Chapter III

Secret message – 'the three are indeed one'

Sri Ramakrishna is resting in the room to the west of the parlour in Balaram's house. He would like to take a nap. It was already late in the evening when Thakur returned to Balaram's house from the home of Ganu's mother – it must have been about 10:45 p.m.

Thakur says, "Jogin, please massage my feet gently for awhile."

Mani is seated close by.

While Jogin gently strokes his feet, Thakur says, "I am feeling hungry. I would like to have a little farina pudding."

The brahmin woman has also accompanied Thakur to Balaram's house. Her brother can play the *banya*[1] and the tabla beautifully. Seeing her again, Thakur says, "The next time Naren or any other singer comes, we will invite her brother to come too."

Thakur takes a little farina pudding. Gradually Jogin and the other devotees leave the room. Mani is gently stroking his feet. Thakur talks with him.

[1] A semi-circular percussion instrument played along with tabla

Sri Ramakrishna — Oh, how happy they were (the brahmin woman and her relatives).

Mani — How wonderful! The same thing happened at the time of Jesus Christ. They, too, were devotees, and sisters – Martha and Mary.

Sri Ramakrishna (eagerly) — What is their story? Please tell me.

Mani — Jesus Christ had gone to their house just as you did, with his devotees. One of the sisters was filled with the joy of ecstasy to see him – as the song of Gaur says:

> Drowned forever, never to return, my eyes sank in the ocean's depths.
>
> Forgetting to swim in the sea of Gaur's beauty, my mind went to the bottom of the sea.

"The other sister was preparing the food all by herself. Becoming fretful over how much she had to do, she came to Christ and complained to him, 'Lord, just look at this. How unfair of my elder sister! She is sitting here alone quietly and I am having to do all the work all by myself.'

"Jesus said, 'Blessed is your sister to have attained the one thing needful in life (that is, ecstatic love of God).' "

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, what do you feel when you see all this?

Mani — I feel that the three persons are indeed one – Jesus Christ, Chaitanyadeva and you – are one person.

Sri Ramakrishna — Of course, one. What is there except one? It is He alone who dwells in this body.

After saying this, Sri Ramakrishna points to his own body – as if to say that the Lord has incarnated Himself and is dwelling in his body.

M. — You explained the other day how God incarnates on earth.

Sri Ramakrishna — Tell me what I said.

Mani — You said, for instance, that there is a vast open and desolate field. In front of it is a wall that one cannot see through. But there is a small round hole in this wall. Through it, one can see a little of the infinite expanse of the field.

Sri Ramakrishna — Tell me, what is this 'hole'?

Mani — You are that 'hole'. Through you, one can see everything – one can see that vast infinite expanse.

Sri Ramakrishna, very pleased, pats Mani and says, "It is very good that you have understood."

Mani — As a matter of fact, it is particularly difficult to understand. We are unable to comprehend how God, Perfect Brahman, can dwell in such a small body.

Sri Ramakrishna — 'I say, no one has recognized Him who roams from home to home in the guise of a mad man.'

Mani — And you were talking of Jesus.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did I say?

Mani — You had passed into bhava samadhi when you saw the picture of Jesus at Jadu Mallick's garden house. You saw Jesus come out of the picture and enter into you.

Thakur remains silent for awhile. Then he says more to Mani, "Perhaps there is a meaning in the disease that I have contracted in my throat – that I should not make myself appear light before all, so that I would not go to all sorts of places and sing and dance."

Thakur talks about Dwija. He asks, "Didn't Dwija come today?"

Mani — I asked him to come. He was supposed to. I don't know why he hasn't.

Sri Ramakrishna — He has great love for me. Well, he must belong to the intimate circle of devotees here, mustn't he?

Mani — Yes, sir, it must be. Otherwise, how could he have so much love?

Mani enters the mosquito net and fans Thakur.

Turning a little toward him, Thakur continues talking. The topic is that God incarnates in the human body to enact His divine sport.

Sri Ramakrishna — That is your spiritual ideal. At one time I didn't see divine forms. That state passed, and now I don't have visions often.

Mani — I like His play as a human being the best of all, His divine sport.

Sri Ramakrishna — That alone is enough to succeed. And you see [His play in] me?

> Is Sri Ramakrishna saying that the Lord has incarnated Himself as a human being in his person and is enacting His divine sport?

Section XX

Thakur with the Devotees on the Holy Vijaya Dashami Day

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees at the Shyampukur house

It is the holy Vijaya Dashami day, 18 October 1885. Thakur is staying at the Shyampukur house[1]. He is unwell. A physician has come from Calcutta to treat him. The devotees stay there to serve him. None of them has yet renounced the world – they come from their family homes.

Surendra's love and devotion to God – 'Divine Mother must reside in the heart'

It is winter, eight o'clock in the morning. Thakur is not feeling well. He is sitting on his bed acting like a five-year-old child who knows nothing but his mother. Surendra arrives and sits down. Navagopal, M. and some other devotees are already present. Surendra has celebrated the Durga Puja at his home. Thakur had not been able to go but had sent his devotees to have the darshan of the image. It is now Vijaya day[2] and Surendra is feeling sad (at the impending separation from the Divine Mother, as on this day Her image will be immersed in the waters of the Ganges.)

Surendra — I ran away from the house.

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[1] Thakur's illness could not be attended properly at Dakshineswar, so his devotees had rented a house in the Shyampukur area of Calcutta

[2] The fourth day of the worship

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Though the image may be immersed in water, let the Divine Mother reside in the heart.

Quietly repeating, "Mother, Mother," Surendra says a few things about the Supreme Goddess.

Thakur looks at him and sheds tears. Looking at M., he says in a voice choked with emotion, "What bhakti! What love and devotion he feels for God!"

Sri Ramakrishna — Around seven or seven-thirty yesterday evening, I had a vision of the worship hall in your home. The image of the deity was bathed in divine light. This place and your worship hall were joined by a stream of light that illumined both places.

Surendra — At that time I was crying 'Mother, Mother' in the worship hall. My elder brothers had gone upstairs, leaving me alone. I felt that the Mother said, 'I will come again.'

Sri Ramakrishna and the *Bhagavad Gita*

It is nearly eleven in the morning. Thakur has eaten the food prescribed for him. Mani is pouring water into his palms so that he can rinse his mouth.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — Rakhal fell sick eating gram lentils. It is good to eat only sattvic food. Haven't you read that in the *Gita*? Do you read the *Gita*?

Mani — Yes, sir. The *Gita* speaks of moderation in diet. It talks of sattvic food, rajasic food and tamasic food. It also talks of sattvic kindness,

rajasic kindness and tamasic kindness. And it describes the sattvic ego and so on.

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you have a copy of the *Gita*?

Mani — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — It contains the essence of all the scriptures.

Mani — Yes, sir. It speaks of realizing God by following various ways. Just as you say that one can reach Him by a number of paths – of knowledge, of love and devotion, of action and of meditation[1].

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you understand the meaning of Karma Yoga? It is to surrender the fruit of all actions to God.

Mani — Sir, the *Gita* does say that. It also says that work can be performed in three different ways.

Sri Ramakrishna — In what three different ways?

Mani — One, to attain knowledge; two, to teach others; and three, according to one's own nature.

Thakur takes a betel leaf after rinsing his mouth. He offers a piece of it from his mouth to Mani as prasad[2].

[1] Jnana, bhakti, karma and dhyana
[2] Sacramental food

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna, Sir Humphrey Davy and the concept of avatar

Thakur is talking to M. about Doctor Sarkar. The previous day M. had gone to the Doctor's house to report Thakur's condition.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did he talk about with you?

M. — The Doctor has many books in his house. I was reading one of them while I sat there. Then I started reading it aloud to the Doctor. The book was by Sir Humphrey Davy. It talked of the need of an incarnation of God.

Sri Ramakrishna — Indeed! What did you say to him?

M. — One passage in the book says that the Divine Truth must be made human truth to be appreciated by us. That is why an incarnation of God is necessary.

Sri Ramakrishna — Very good. All this is very nice.

M. — The foreign author gave this illustration: one cannot gaze at the sun, but one can look at its reflected rays.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, nice idea. Anything else?

M. — In another passage it says that true jnana (knowledge) is nothing but faith.

Sri Ramakrishna — That is a grand idea! One who has faith, surely has everything.

M. — The author had dreamt of Roman gods and goddesses.

Sri Ramakrishna — Have such books really been published? It is God Himself at work there. Did you talk of anything else?

Sri Ramakrishna and 'doing welfare work,' or Karma Yoga

M. — He says that he works for the welfare of the world. That is why I told him what you said.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What did I say?

M. — You talked of Sambhu Mallick. He had said to you: 'I want to build hospitals, dispensaries, and schools with my money. That will benefit many.' I told the Doctor what you had said to him: Suppose God appears before you. Will you ask Him to build hospitals, dispensaries and schools for you? And I said another thing to the Doctor.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, it is a different class of people who are born for work. What else did you say?

M. — I said: If your aim is to have the darshan of Mother Kali in the temple, what will you gain by

giving in charity to a mendicant? Rather, try the best you can to have the darshan of Kali. After that, you can give in charity as much as you like.

Sri Ramakrishna — Did you talk about anything else?

The devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and victory over lust

M. — We agreed that many of those who visit you have conquered lust. The Doctor said, 'In my case, too, lust has vanished – did you know?' I said, 'You are indeed a great man. That you have conquered lust is not surprising. But it is amazing that even insignificant and ordinary people influenced by him [Sri Ramakrishna] have conquered their passions.' Then I told him what you said to Girish Ghosh.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — What did I say to him?

M. — You said to Girish: 'The Doctor hasn't been able to change your mind.' You said that with reference to his calling you an incarnation of God.

Sri Ramakrishna — Please talk to the Doctor about divine incarnation – that he who liberates is God-incarnate. The scriptures talk of ten avatars, or twenty-four avatars, and also of innumerable incarnations of God.

Gradually giving up drinking altogether

M. — The Doctor asks a lot about Girish Ghosh. He keeps asking, 'Has Girish Ghosh given up drinking altogether?' He keeps a sharp eye on him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Did you tell Girish about it?

M. — Yes, sir, I did. And I talked to him about his giving up drinking.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did he say to you?

M. — He said, 'I take your words as those of Thakur, so I accept them. I cannot, however, promise anything.'

Sri Ramakrishna (happily) — Kalipada told me that he has given up drinking altogether.

Chapter III

Identity of the Absolute or Universal Ego and the phenomenal world

It is afternoon. Doctor Sarkar has arrived. Amrita (the Doctor's son) and Hem have come with him. Narendra and other devotees are present. Thakur is talking privately with Amrita. He asks him, "Are you able to meditate?" He adds, "Do you know what one experiences in meditation? The mind becomes like a continuous flow of oil – one has just one thought, that of God. No other thought intrudes." Now Thakur talks to everyone else.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Doctor) — Your son doesn't believe in the incarnation of God. That's all right. It doesn't matter if he believes it or not.

"Your son is a nice boy. Why shouldn't he be? Can an ordinary mango be borne by a [fine] 'Bombay' mango tree? How great is his faith in God! He whose mind dwells in God is truly a man[1] – that is, *mana-hosha* (of awakened mind). He whose spiritual consciousness has been awakened knows clearly that God is eternal and everything else is ephemeral. He is a man with an awakened mind. Your son does not believe in divine incarnation. There is no harm in that.

"It is enough if one believes that God exists and the universe and its living beings are the manifestations of His power. It is like a rich man and his garden.

"Some say there are ten avatars, some say twenty-four avatars, others that there are innumerable incarnations of God. Wherever you see a special manifestation of His power, God has incarnated Himself. This is my belief.

"And there is another view, according to which God has become everything – whatever you see. Take, for example, the bel-fruit – it consists of three parts: seeds, rind and kernel. The Absolute belongs to the same Being to whom the phenomenal world belongs. And the phenomenal world belongs to the same Being to whom the Absolute belongs. Disavowing the Absolute, you simply cannot understand the phenomenal world – because the

[1] That is *manushya*

phenomenal world does exist. Only by transcending it step by step can one reach the Absolute.

"As long as one entertains the feeling of I-consciousness, one cannot go beyond the phenomenal world. By negating the Relative while meditating, saying, 'Not this, not this[1],' one reaches the Absolute. But nothing can really be denied, as I gave you the illustration of the bel-fruit."

The Doctor — That is certainly true.

Sri Ramakrishna — Kacha passed into Nirvikalpa samadhi. When his samadhi ended, someone asked him, 'What do you see now?' Kacha said, 'I see that the world is one with Him. Everything is filled with God. It is God who has become all that I see. I do not know what to reject and what to accept.'

"Do you know what I think? Having attained the vision of the Absolute, together with the phenomenal world, one should live with the attitude of being a servant of God. Hanuman saw both God with form and without form. Thereafter, he lived with the attitude of a servant of God, as His devotee."

Mani (to himself) — One must accept both the Absolute[2] and the phenomenal world[3]. Since the Vedanta philosophy has reached Germany, some of the European philosophers have accepted this line of thought. Thakur, however, says, 'One does not

[1] Neti, neti
[2] Nitya
[3] Lila

attain the vision of the Absolute and the phenomenal world without renouncing everything, without renouncing 'lust and greed'. One has to totally renounce; one must have absolute non-attachment to the world.' This is the crucial difference between him and such [European] philosophers as Hegel.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna and doctrine of avatar – reconciliation of free will and predestination

The Doctor says that God has created us, and the soul of all of us will make infinite progress. He does not accept that one person is greater than another. That is why he doesn't believe in an incarnation of God.

The Doctor — One makes infinite progress! If that is not so, why live five or seven years more? I would rather hang myself with a rope.

"What is an incarnation of God? Why should I prostrate at the feet of a person who has to ease himself and urinate? But yes, I accept that God's light reflects in man."

Girish (laughing) — Have you seen God's light?

Before the Doctor answers, he hesitates for a moment. A friend sitting close to him whispers something to him.

The Doctor — You have only seen the reflection, nothing else.

Girish — I see it! I see the light! I shall prove that Sri Krishna is an avatar. If I fail, I will cut out my tongue!

Only a person suffering from mental aberration or delirium reasons – reasoning stops in the state of perfect knowledge

Sri Ramakrishna — The conversation you have just had carries no weight.

"It is just like the raving of a person suffering from delirium. Such a diseased person says, 'I wish to drink a pitcher of water and eat a pot of boiled rice.' The physician says to him, 'Yes, all right. We will give you whatever you want after you have taken the prescribed medicine.'

"When butter is heated, it makes a crackling sound. But when it is thoroughly boiled, the crackling sound ceases. As a man's mind is, so is his conception of God. I have seen portraits of rich people – the queen and so forth – hanging on the walls of rich people's homes. But devotees have images of deities hung in their houses.

"Lakshmana said, 'Rama, Vaishishtha is a great sage[1] but even he grieved at the death of his son.' Rama replied, 'Brother, he who has knowledge also has ignorance; he who is aware of light is also aware of darkness. Go beyond both knowledge and ignorance[2]. One attains such a state only when one knows God intimately – this is what is known as vijnana.

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[1] Rishi
[2] Jnana and ajnana

"When a thorn digs into one's foot, one must take another thorn to take it out. Afterwards, you throw them both away. By removing the thorn of ignorance with the thorn of knowledge, one should throw away both the thorns of knowledge and ignorance.

"There is a sign of perfect knowledge. One stops reasoning. Just as I said that butter, when heated, crackles until it is thoroughly boiled."

The Doctor — But can one retain perfect knowledge permanently? If God has become everything, why are you behaving like a paramahamsa? And why do these people come here to serve you? Why don't you sit quietly and not say a word?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Water is water, whether it is still or moving. It remains water when it is in waves.

Voice of God or conscience – mahout as Narayana

"There is something else. Why should I not listen to what the mahout Narayana says? The guru said to his disciple that everyone was God. A mad elephant was approaching. Putting his faith in the words of his guru, that the elephant was Narayana too, the disciple did not move away. The mahout shouted, 'Everyone, please get away! Do get away!' But the disciple did not move. The elephant picked him up and threw him to the ground and then went its way. The disciple did not die. He regained consciousness when water was poured into his mouth. Asked why he didn't move away, he said,

'My revered guru said that everything is Narayana.' The guru then said, 'Son, why didn't you listen to the mahout Narayana?' God resides within as pure mind and pure intellect. I am the machine, God is the operator. I am the house and He is the indweller. It is God who is the mahout Narayana."

The Doctor — I ask you this, 'Why, then, do you ask me to cure your illness?'

Sri Ramakrishna — I talk that way as long as I am conscious of the 'jar' of the 'ego'. Imagine an immense ocean of water. A jar is immersed in the ocean. The jar then has water inside and outside it. The water in the jar does not become one with the water outside until the jar is broken. God Himself has kept this jar of I-consciousness in me.

Who am I?

The Doctor — What is this 'I' that you are talking about? You must explain it. Is God playing tricks on us?

Girish — Sir, how do you know that He is not playing tricks?

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — It is certainly God who has kept this 'I' in us – it is His play, His lila. A king has four sons (who are all princes) but, playing with each other, one takes the role of a minister, another a police officer, and so forth. Though a son of a king, he plays the role of a police officer.

(To the Doctor) "Listen. When one has a direct vision of the Atman, one accepts all this. All doubts vanish when one has vision of God."

Son-ship and the Father – Sri Ramakrishna and Jnana Yoga

The Doctor — Does one ever get rid of all doubts?

Sri Ramakrishna — Just learn this much from me. If you wish to learn more, pray to God about it in a solitary corner. Ask Him why He has created all this.

"A boy can only give a beggar a cup of rice as alms. If the beggar asks for train fare, the master of the house must be called. (The Doctor is silent.)

"Well, you like to reason and discuss things. I will reason with you, but please listen to me. A jnani does not believe in the incarnation of God. Krishna said to Arjuna, 'You call me an avatar time and again. Let me show you something. Come with me.' Arjuna accompanied him for some distance, then Krishna asked, 'What do you see?' Arjuna said,' A big tree with black berries hanging in clusters.' Sri Krishna said, 'They are not black berries. Go a few steps nearer and look at them.' Arjuna then saw that they were clusters of Krishnas hanging on the tree. Krishna said, 'Do you see how many Krishnas like me exist there?'

"Kavirdas said of Sri Krishna, 'The gopis clapped their hands and he danced like a monkey.'

"The nearer you approach God, the fewer of His attributes you notice. A devotee first had the

vision of God with ten arms. Going nearer, he saw that God had six arms. When he advanced still closer, he only saw Gopala[1] with two arms. The closer he went to God, the less he saw His splendour and glories. At last he saw only divine light – there was no visible attribute.

"Listen a little to Vedantic reasoning. A magician came to a king to show him his magic feats. When he moved a little to one side, the king saw that a rider on horseback was coming. He was well-dressed and held weapons in his hands. The king and the audience in the court began to wonder what, in fact, was real. Evidently the horse was not real, nor the robes or weapons. Finally they saw that the only reality was a rider standing there alone. The significance of this is that Brahman alone is Real and the world is illusory. When you reason, nothing whatsoever remains."

The Doctor — I have no objection to this.

The world and the scarecrow

Sri Ramakrishna — However, it is not easy to dispel the illusion that the world is real. It persists even after one attains divine knowledge. A person sees a tiger in a dream. He wakes up and the dream ends. But his heart continues to pound.

"Some thieves went to a farm to steal. A man's figure made of straw had been put there to frighten intruders. The thieves could not persuade themselves to enter. One of them went closer and

[1] Baby Krishna

found that it was only a scarecrow. He came back to the other thieves and told them there was nothing to fear, but they still refused to go – they told him that their hearts were beating violently. The thief then laid the scarecrow down on the ground and said, 'It is nothing, it is nothing.' This is the process of '*Neti, neti*[1]'."

The Doctor — These are all very nice words.

Sri Ramakrishna (laughing) — What kind of words?

The Doctor — Fine.

Sri Ramakrishna — Say, 'thank you'[2] at least once.

The Doctor — But don't you understand what feelings there are in my heart? And I take such trouble to come here to see you!

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — No, my dear, it is not that. Say something for the benefit of the ignorant. Bibhishana did not want to become the king of Lanka [after Ravana was killed by Rama]. He said, 'What would I get by being a king after I have obtained you?' Rama said, 'Bibhishana, become king for the benefit of the ignorant. Become a king to instruct those who ask what riches you have gained by serving Rama so much.'

The Doctor — Are there ignorant people here?

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[1] Not this, not this
[2] The words 'thank you' were said by Sri Ramakrishna in English

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) —Yes, yes, you have oysters and snails here as well as conch shells. (All laugh.)

Chapter V

Purusha and Prakriti – eligibility of taking spiritual instructions

The Doctor gives two globules of medicine to Thakur, saying, "I give you both globules: one is Purusha and the other Prakriti." (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Yes, they live side by side. Haven't you seen pigeons? They can't live apart from one another. Where there is Prakriti, there is Purusha; and where there is Purusha, there is Prakriti.

It is the Vijaya Dashami day today. Thakur asks the Doctor to have some sweets on the occasion. The devotees serve him sweets.

The Doctor (while eating) — I 'thank you' for the sweets. It is not for the instructions you have given today. Why should I give that 'thank you' in words?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Fix your mind on God. What more can I say? Meditate a little. (Pointing to the Younger Naren) Just see, his mind becomes absolutely merged in God. Those things I told you ...

The Doctor — Tell these people too.

Sri Ramakrishna — It all depends on one's capacity to digest. Can everyone understand all I have told you? I can't talk to everyone as I talked to you. A mother has brought home some fish to cook. Her children do not have the same digestion, so for one she prepares pulao and for the others fish curry – the latter have poor digestion. (All laugh.)

The Doctor leaves. It is Vijaya Dashami today. All the devotees pay obeisance to Thakur by prostrating on the ground and taking the dust of his feet. Then they embrace one another. They are beyond themselves with joy. In this happiness, they forget that Thakur is seriously ill. Their embracing and enjoying of sweets continues for a long time. The Younger Naren, M. and few other devotees sit with Thakur. He talks happily with them. The topic of conversation is the change in Dr. Sarkar.

Sri Ramakrishna — I shall not have to instruct the Doctor much more.

"When a tree is almost axed in two, the person who is felling it stands some distance away after his last blow. In a little while the tree falls by itself."

The Younger Naren (smiling) — All these are principles!

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — Hasn't the Doctor changed a great deal?

M. — Yes, sir. When he comes here, he becomes stupefied. He doesn't even talk about the medicine he will give you. When we remind him of it, he says, 'Yes, yes, he has to be given medicine.'

Some of the devotees are singing in the parlour.

When they return to the room where Thakur is sitting, he says to them, "You were singing. Why was the song not in rhythm? I once heard of a man who was perfect at losing the beat – you sang like him." (They all laugh.)

A boy, the Younger Naren's relative, has arrived. He is dressed as a dandy and is wearing glasses. Thakur is talking to the Younger Naren.

Sri Ramakrishna — Look here. A boy with a pleated robe was going by here. The way he was walking! He would remove his scarf to show the pleats on the front of his dress. Then he would look around to see if anybody had noticed him. When he walked, his hips seemed to be out of joint. (All laugh.) Just look at him.

"A peacock makes a show of its feathers – but it has hideous feet. (All laugh.) The camel is so ugly. Everything about it is ugly!"

Naren's Relative — But it conduct's itself well.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, it does. But it eats thorny bushes. Though its mouth bleeds, it continues to eat them. A worldly person loses his son and soon after pines for another.

Section XXI

Sri Ramakrishna at the Shyampukur House

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at the Shyampukur house in Calcutta with devotees

It is Friday, 30 October 1885, the seventh day of the dark fortnight of Aswin, 15th of Kartik. Sri Ramakrishna has come to Shyampukur for treatment. He is in his room on the upper story. It is 9 o'clock. He is talking with M. privately. M. will soon go to Doctor Sarkar to report Thakur's pain in the throat and to bring him to the Shyampukur house. Thakur is so very sick, yet his only concern is the welfare of his devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M., smiling) — Purna came to see me this morning. He has such a good nature. Manindra has a feminine attitude[1]. How amazing! After reading the *Chaitanya Charitamrita* he is inclined toward the attitude of a gopi[2], or a female lover of the Lord[3] – as though God is male and he female.

M. — Yes, sir

Purna Chandra is a schoolboy, 15 or 16 years old. Thakur is very eager to see him, but Purna's family

[1] Prakriti bhava
[2] Milkmaid at Vraja
[3] Sakhi

does not let him visit. One time he became so eager to see Purna that he went at night from Dakshineswar to M.'s house in Calcutta. M. brought Purna there to meet with Thakur. After a long conversation about how to call on God, Thakur had returned to Dakshineswar.

Manindra is also 15 or 16 years old. He is called Khoka[1] by the devotees – they still call him by this name [referring to the time the book was written]. He dances, absorbed with divine ecstasy, when he hears the chanting of the name and glories of God.

Chapter II

The Doctor and M.

It is between ten and ten-thirty. M. has gone to Doctor Sarkar's house. There is a verandah, which adjoins the parlour on the first floor and overlooks a path. There they sit on a wooden bench and talk. In front of the Doctor is a glass aquarium in which goldfish are swimming. Now and then the Doctor throws pieces of the green husk of cardamoms in the water. He also throws little balls of refined wheat flour, which he has made, to the open roof for sparrows and other birds to eat. M. watches him.

The Doctor (laughing, to M.) — Look at the goldfish watching me. They don't see the green cardamom husks I have thrown them. So I say that mere love and devotion[2] will get you nowhere. You need knowledge[3] too. (M. laughs.) Look. The sparrows flew away when I threw the wheat balls at them. They were frightened. They gained no love and

[1] Baby
[2] Bhakti
[3] Jnana

devotion because they have no knowledge. They don't know that wheat balls are food.

The Doctor goes to the drawing room. Books fill shelves all around the room. He takes a little rest while M. browses through the books and even reads a little. At last, he picks up the book *Life of Jesus* written by Canon Farrar. He reads it for some time.

The Doctor says something now and then. He asks M. to read the correspondence about the homeopathic hospital, which had come into existence after many problems. He says, "You will find this correspondence in the *Calcutta Journal of Medicine* of 1876." The Doctor has great love for homeopathy.

M. picks up a book with the title *Munger's New Theology*. The Doctor notices it.

The Doctor — Munger has based his principles on very nice reasoning and logic. Your Chaitanya has said one thing, the Buddha and Jesus Christ have stated something else. You put your faith in their words simply because these people have said so.

M. (smiling) — So we should not believe in Chaitanya, or Buddha, but we should believe in Munger.

The Doctor — All right, whatever you say.

M. — People have to quote someone as the authority; that is how Munger became established. (The Doctor smiles.)

The Doctor gets into the carriage with M. The carriage proceeds toward Shyampukur. It is midday. The Doctor and M. continue talking while the

carriage moves on. They talk about Doctor Bhaduri who also comes to treat Thakur now and then.

M. (smiling) — Talking about you, Bhaduri said, 'He has to begin over again as a brick-bat.'

The Doctor — What do you mean?

M. — You don't believe in great spiritual personalities[1], subtle bodies and all that. Apparently Doctor Bhaduri is a Theosophist. Besides, you don't believe in the divine sport of incarnations of God. Therefore, he jokingly says about you, 'He will not be born as a human being in the next birth, not even as a creature, nor as an animal, tree or plant. He will have to start as a piece of brick. Then, after many, many births, he might some day assume a human body.'

The Doctor — Good gracious!

M. — He further says that the knowledge of science that you have acquired is illusory – it is here now, but it may disappear the next moment. He gives an illustration. There are two wells. One of them receives its water from an underground spring. The other well has no spring; it is filled with rainwater. The water in the latter well cannot last long. Your knowledge of science will also dry up like the rainwater in the well.

The Doctor (smiling) — Really!

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[1] Mahatmas

The carriage reaches Cornwallis Street. Doctor Sarkar picks up Doctor Pratap, who had visited Thakur the previous day.

Chapter III

Instructions to Doctor Sarkar – meditation of a jnani[1]

Thakur is seated in the same second story room with some devotees. He is talking with Doctor Sarkar and Doctor Pratap.

Dr. Sarkar (to Sri Ramakrishna) — So you had *kashi*[2] again? (Smiling) It is, however, good to visit Kashi. (All laugh.)

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — It brings liberation[3], dear. But I don't want liberation, I want only love and devotion for God[4]. (The doctors and the devotees laugh.)

Pratap is the son-in-law of Dr. Bhaduri. When he sees Pratap, Thakur speaks highly of Bhaduri.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Pratap) — Ah, what a person he has turned into! He contemplates God, observes purity in conduct, and accepts both attitudes of formless God and God with form.

M. is very keen to discuss Dr. Bhaduri's saying that Dr. Sarkar would be born again as a brickbat. He whispers to the Younger Naren just loud enough that

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[1] Man of Knowledge
[2] Pun upon the word that means both coughing and Benares, another name of Kashi
[3] Mukti
[4] Bhakti

Thakur can hear, "Do you remember what Bhaduri said about bricks and brickbats?"

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to Dr. Sarkar) — Do you know what he said about you? Since you don't believe in these things, you will have to start all over again by becoming a brickbat in the next cycle[1]. (All laugh.)

Dr. Sarkar (smiling) — So I will start again as a stone or a brick and assume a human body after many, many births. Even after I have come to this place [referring to Sri Ramakrishna], I will still have to start all over again with bricks and pieces of brick! (The Doctor and others laugh.)

Thakur is so sick. Even so, he goes into divine moods. And he always talks of spiritual things – such is the trend of the conversation.

Pratap — I saw you yesterday in an ecstatic mood.

Sri Ramakrishna — It came by itself. It wasn't much.

Dr. Sarkar — It is not good for you to talk with others now, and go into divine ecstasy.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Doctor) — I saw you yesterday in my ecstasy. I saw that you are a mine of knowledge, but it is absolutely dry knowledge. I didn't find the taste of divine bliss in it. (To Pratap) If he (Dr. Sarkar) once tastes the joy of divine bliss,

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[1] *Manvantar*, the period of millions of years of Manu

he will see everything, above and below, filled with it. Then he will not say that only what he says is right and what others say is wrong. Then his lips will cease uttering sharp and aggressive words.

Goal of life – his earlier story – instructions of the Naked One

The devotees are all silent. Thakur suddenly becomes absorbed in divine ecstasy and speaks.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Doctor Sarkar) — I say, Mahendra Babu, why do you harp on money? You talk so much of your wife and of name and fame. Give all these up and direct your mind to God with full concentration. Enjoy the bliss of God.

Doctor Sarkar does not utter a word. Everyone else is also silent.

Sri Ramakrishna — The Naked One[1] used to tell how the jnani meditates. There is an expanse of water stretching everywhere – all regions above and below are full of water. The individual soul is like a fish swimming joyfully in this water. One actually sees this when one really meditates.

"There is a boundless expanse of ocean with no limit to its water. Now imagine a pot in the ocean. There is water both inside and outside the pot. The jnani sees that there is the same Paramatman both within and without. Then what is the pot? It is the I-consciousness. Because of the pot, water seems to be divided into two parts – as if one part of the

[1] Totapuri

water is inside the pot and the other outside. As long as one's 'pot of ego' persists, one feels this way. But when the ego vanishes, what remains is that which is. It cannot be spoken in words.

"Do you know another way the jnani meditates? There is the boundless sky with a bird flying in it joyfully with extended wings. That is the sky of consciousness, and the Atman is the bird. The bird is not within a cage – it is flying in the sky of consciousness. Its joy is limitless[1]."

The devotees hear of the yoga of meditation[2] in amazement. After a short time, Pratap resumes the conversation.

Pratap (to Dr. Sarkar) — If you reflect on it, you find it is all only a shadow.

Dr. Sarkar — For a shadow to be there, three objects are necessary: the sun, the object reflected, and the reflection. There can't be a shadow without an object. You say that God is real and the creation unreal. The creation is real too.

Pratap — Well, just as one sees a shadow in a mirror, similarly one sees this world in the mirror of the mind.

The Doctor — Can there be a shadow without an object?

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[1] Compare P.B. Shelley's 'To a Skylark'
[2] Dhyana yoga

Naren — Why, God is the object! (The Doctor is silent.)

Universal consciousness and science – God alone is the Doer

Sri Ramakrishna (to the Doctor) — You have said a very nice thing: that one goes into bhava samadhi[1] when the mind is in union with God[2]. Only you have said this, no one else has said it.

"Shivanath says, 'Too much contemplation of God deranges one's brain.' He says, 'By meditating on the universal consciousness, one loses consciousness.' God is the very Self of consciousness! That one should lose the power of consciousness by meditating on Him through whose consciousness one is conscious of the world!

"As for your science – by combining this substance with that, it becomes that; and by mixing such and such a substance with that produces this. One can definitely get robbed of one's consciousness by thinking of those things – it is just the grinding of gross objects together."

Dr. Sarkar — One can see God in those things.

Mani — One can see God all the more clearly in a man, and even more clearly in a spiritually elevated person. There is a greater manifestation of God in great souls.

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[1] *Bhava-avashtha*, the highest spiritual state of absorption just before the mind merges in the Absolute Oneness

[2] Yoga

Dr. Sarkar — Yes, no doubt in man.

Sri Ramakrishna — Can man get robbed of his consciousness by contemplating God? By God's consciousness even inert things gain consciousness – it is behind the movement of hands, feet and body. One says the body is moving, but doesn't know that it is God who is moving it. One says that the hand has been scalded by water. The water does not scald anything. It is the heat in the water, the fire in the water, that scalds the hand.

"Rice is boiling in a pot. Eggplant and potatoes are bobbing up and down in it. A little boy seeing them says, 'The eggplant and potatoes are dancing.' He doesn't know that there is fire underneath. People say that the sense organs do their work of themselves. They don't know that inside dwells God, whose very nature is consciousness."

Doctor Sarkar rises to take his leave. Sri Ramakrishna stands up, too.

Dr. Sarkar — One calls upon God[1] in adversity. One willingly says *tuhu*, *tuhu* (Thou, Thou – the sound of the carding bow). You speak as you do because you have this disease in your throat. As you yourself say, you have fallen into the hands of a carder. You had better speak to the carder about it. I am just quoting your own words.

Sri Ramakrishna — What can I say?

[1] Madhusudana

Dr. Sarkar — We dwell in God's lap and defecate in His arms. Why not speak about our illness to Him?

Sri Ramakrishna — Quite right. Sometimes I try – but I cannot.

The Doctor — Why should it be necessary to say anything to Him? Doesn't God know it?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — A Muslim was loudly calling out, 'O Allah! O Allah!' during his offering of Namaz. Someone said to him, 'Why are you shouting so loudly when you are calling upon Allah? He can hear even the sound of little anklets on an ant's feet!'

Signs of a yogi – yogi is introverted – saint Vilwamangal

Sri Ramakrishna — When the mind is united with God, one sees God very near. One sees God within one's own heart.

"But then it is true that the more one is established in union with God, the greater one's mind withdraws itself from external objects. The holy scripture *Bhaktamala* talks of a devotee (Vilwamangal) who used to visit a prostitute. One day he was going to visit her very late at night. The shraddha ceremony of his parents at home had delayed him. He was carrying the shraddha food for the prostitute. His mind was so focused on her that he was not aware where he was walking. A yogi was seated on the path, meditating on God with his eyes closed. Vilwamangal was about to step on the yogi. The yogi cried out in anger, 'Can't you see I

am meditating on God and you are about to walk on my body?' Vilwamangal said, 'I beg your pardon, but I want to ask you something. I have lost all awareness thinking of a prostitute, whereas you are meditating on God and yet are fully aware of external things. What kind of meditation is that?' Vilwamangal in time renounced his household and went away to worship God. He said to the prostitute, 'You are my guru. You have taught me how one must love the Lord.' He addressed the prostitute as his mother and gave her up."

Dr. Sarkar — This is the Tantrik form of worship, when one considers the woman with whom one cohabits[1] as one's mother.

Worldly man has no right to instruct mankind

Sri Ramakrishna — Look here, listen to a story. There was a king who used to listen to the reading of the *Bhagavata* from a pundit every day. After the reading, the pundit would ask the king, 'Sir, have you understood it?' The king would reply, 'You must understand it yourself first.' And when he returned home the pundit would ask himself, 'Why does the king say this every day? I explain everything to him so clearly, yet he repeats, 'Understand it yourself first.' What does it mean?' The pundit used to practice spiritual disciplines. After some days he realized that God alone is real and that everything else – hearth and home, wealth, family, relatives, name and fame – are all unreal. When he realized that all things in the world are illusory, he

[1] *Ramani*

renounced it. However, when leaving, he asked a man, 'Please tell the king that I have now understood.'

"And listen to another story. Someone wanted to engage a scholar well versed in the Bhagavata to come daily and read *Srimad Bhagavata* to him. But he couldn't find such a scholar. After a great search, a person came to him and said, 'Sir, I have found an excellent pundit of the Bhagavata.' The man said, 'Very good! Please bring him.' His friend said, 'But there is a complication. The man has a number of ploughs and bullocks; he is busy with them all day long. He has to look after his farm – he has no leisure at all.' The man who was seeking the scholar of the Bhagavata said, 'Oh Brother, I don't want a pundit of the holy word who has to look after ploughs and bullocks. I am looking for a man who has leisure and can tell me about the Lord.' (To the Doctor) Do you understand?"

The Doctor remains silent.

Mere learning and the Doctor

Sri Ramakrishna — Do you want to know the truth? Mere learning and scholarship benefit one not at all. Pundits know so much and hear a lot of things – the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and the *Tantras*. But of what avail is mere learning? Discrimination and non-attachment are necessary. One must listen to him alone who has attained discrimination and non-attachment. Of what use are the words of those who have made the world their main goal in life?

"What happens when you read the *Gita*? If you repeat the word *Gita* ten times, it becomes *tagi*[1]. Only he who has renounced his attachment to 'lust and greed' and who can direct a hundred percent of his love to God can understand the essence of the *Gita*. One doesn't have to read the whole of the *Gita*. Just say, '*Tagi*, *tagi*,' and it is done."

Dr. Sarkar — *Tagi* needs the extra letter 'y' to become *tyagi* [the correct Sanskrit word for a renouncer].

Mani — Goswami Navadvip said to Thakur that one can do without adding the letter 'y'. When Thakur attended the festival at Panihati, Goswami Navadvip talked to him about this context of the *Gita*. The Goswami said, 'By the root 'tag' it becomes 'taga'. Add the 'i' suffix to tag and it becomes '*tagi*'. Both '*tagi*' and '*tyagi*' convey the same meaning.'

Dr. Sarkar — Someone told me what Radha means. He asked me whether I knew the meaning of the word Radha. He said, 'It is what it becomes when you reverse the word; in other words, it means 'dhara,' 'dhara[2]'. (All laugh.) (Smiling) Let us stop here today at 'dhara'.

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[1] A man of renunciation

[2] A word which has no particular meaning. The doctor was making fun of a play on words.

Chapter IV

Worldly knowledge and science

The Doctor has gone. M. comes and sits close to Sri Ramakrishna. They talk quietly together. M. had been to the Doctor's house. He speaks of what they talked about there.

M. (to Sri Ramakrishna) — The Doctor was feeding his goldfish with the husk of green cardamom and sparrows with balls of refined wheat flour. He said, 'See, they didn't see the cardamom husk, so they left. First of all, one needs to have knowledge[1]; love and devotion[2] will follow. As soon as the flour balls were thrown at the birds, one or two flew away. They didn't have the knowledge that the balls were food, therefore they gained no devotion.'

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — This kind of knowledge is called worldly knowledge – the knowledge of science.

M. — He then said, 'I will not put faith in words just because a Chaitanya, or a Buddha, or a Jesus Christ said them.'

"A grandson has been born to him. He praised his daughter-in-law. He said, 'I don't notice her in the house at all, she is so quiet and bashful.' "

Sri Ramakrishna — He has been thinking of this place [meaning himself], so slowly he is gaining

[1] Jnana
[2] Bhakti

faith and respect. Is it possible to get rid of one's ego altogether? He is so learned, enjoys such name and fame – and he has a lot of money! Yet he does not show disrespect for what he hears here.

Chapter V

Descent of divine power, or ever-blissful state

It is five o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in the same upper story room. The devotees are sitting quietly around him. Many of them are outsiders. No words are spoken.

M. is seated close to Sri Ramakrishna. He talks with him quietly on one or two topics. Thakur wants to wear his long shirt – M. helps him to put it on.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.) — You see, now I don't have to practice meditation or other spiritual disciplines as much. I become aware of the Indivisible Being all at once. Now I see Him alone.

M. is silent and so is everybody else in the room. After awhile Thakur says something else to him.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, you are seeing all these people sitting quietly and looking at me. They don't talk, nor do they sing. What do they see in me?

Is Thakur hinting that the Divine Power of the Lord has incarnated in him? Is that why so many people are attracted to him, why the devotees are gazing at him speechless with wonder?

In reply, M says, "Sir, all these people have already heard a lot about you. Now they are seeing what they have never seen before – an ever-blissful

childlike nature, with no ego, and intoxicated with ecstatic love for God. The other day you went to Ishan Mukherji's house and paced the outer room. I was there with you. Someone said about you, 'I have never seen such a blissful person before.' "

M. stops talking. It is again completely quiet in the room. After some time Thakur speaks to M. in his sweet voice.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, how is the Doctor doing? Is he now accepting more ideas from here?

M. — How can an imperishable seed be lost? It must sprout somewhere some time. I still laugh at what happened the other day.

Sri Ramakrishna — What was that?

M. — You said, 'Jadu Mallick becomes so absent-minded that he can't tell whether there is salt in his food or not. If anybody tells him there is no salt in such and such item, he exclaims, 'Why, what? No salt?' ' You told the Doctor about it. He also used to say, 'I become so absent-minded.' You made him understand that his absent-mindedness comes from thinking of worldly things; it is not because of meditation on God.

Sri Ramakrishna — Will he not reflect on these words?

M. — How can he help but think about them? But he remains busy in numerous activities, so he forgets many things. Today, too, you replied to him

nicely when he said, 'In Tantric discipline one looks on the *ramani*[1] as mother.'

Sri Ramakrishna — What did I say?

M. — You talked about the Bhagavata pundit who owned a number of ploughs and bullocks. (Sri Ramakrishna laughs.) And you told the story of the king who said to the pundit, 'First understand it yourself.' (Sri Ramakrishna laughs.)

"And you also talked about the *Gita*, that the main message of the *Gita* is renunciation of 'lust and greed' – giving up attachment to 'lust and greed'. You said to the Doctor that being a householder (without renouncing them), one could teach nothing. It seems he didn't understand. He changed the subject by saying, 'Dhara dhara' in the end and left."

Thakur is worried about the welfare of the devotees. He is worried about Purna and Manindra, two of his young devotees. He has sent Manindra to talk to Purna.

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna talks about the basic truth of Radha and Krishna – everything is possible – the Absolute and the phenomenal

It is evening. A lamp is burning in Sri Ramakrishna's room. Many devotees and visitors who have come to see Thakur are seated in the same room some distance away from him. Thakur is introspective and

[1] Woman with whom one cohabits

not talking to anyone. Those who are sitting in the room are also silent and meditating on God.

After awhile, Narendra arrives with a friend. Narendra introduces him, "He is a friend of mine. He has written several books. He wrote *Kiranmayi*." The author of *Kiranmayi* salutes Sri Ramakrishna and takes a seat. He would like to talk with Thakur.

Narendra — He has written about Radha and Krishna.

Sri Ramakrishna (to the author) — What have you written, my dear? Tell me a little, let me hear.

The Author — Radha and Krishna are the supreme Brahman – they are a dot of Om. From this very Supreme Brahman, Radha and Krishna, has emerged Vishnu. From Vishnu have sprung Purusha and Prakriti – Shiva and Durga.

Sri Ramakrishna — Beautiful! Nanda Ghosh had the vision of the Eternal[1] Radha. Radha sported in Vrindavan in her aspect of Love[2]. Chandravali was Radha's aspect of the Seductress[3].

"The Seductress and the Love Radha. Advance further and there is the Eternal Radha. When you peel an onion, you find the outermost skin red. Then comes pink. Then white. There is nothing more to peel off. This is the real nature of the Eternal Radha – where reasoning 'not this, not this' ends.

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[1] Nitya
[2] Prema
[3] Kama

"Radha and Krishna have two aspects: the Absolute and the Phenomenal – like the sun and its rays. The sun represents the Absolute and its rays signify the phenomenal world.

"A pure-hearted devotee sometimes dwells on the Absolute and at times on the phenomenal world. The Absolute and the phenomenal belong to the same Reality. It is all one – neither two nor many."

The Author — Sir, why do they say 'the Krishna of Vrindavan' and 'the Krishna of Mathura'[1]?

Sri Ramakrishna — That is according to the goswamis. The scholars of upper India [west Uttar Pradesh and the Punjab] don't think this way. To them, there is only Krishna, and no Radha. The Krishna of Dwaraka is not associated with Radha.

The Author — Sir, Radha and Krishna are themselves the Supreme Brahman.

Sri Ramakrishna — Beautifully said. But everything is possible for God. He is indeed with form and also formless. He is both the individual[2] and the universal[3]. He is Brahman, and He is Shakti.

"There is no end to God – no limit. Everything is possible for God. However high kites and

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[1] Sri Krishna of Vrindavan where he exhibited rasa lila is always associated with Radha and the gopis, whereas Sri Krishna of Mathura and Dwaraka, where he was the king, is not associated with Radha

[2] *Svarata*

[3] *Virat*

vultures fly, they cannot touch the top of the sky. If you ask what Brahman is like, well, it is not possible to describe in words. Even if one has realized Brahman, one cannot explain. If someone were to ask what clarified butter is like, the only answer to is, 'Clarified butter is like clarified butter.' The only analogy of Brahman is Brahman; nothing else."

Section XXII

Sri Ramakrishna at the Shyampukur House

Chapter I

With devotees at the Shyampukur House on Kali Puja Day

Sri Ramakrishna is standing in the southern room on the second floor of the Shyampukur house. It is nine o'clock. He is dressed in a freshly laundered cloth and wears a sandal paste mark on his forehead.

At the behest of Thakur, M. has brought some prasad from the Siddheshwari Kali Temple. Holding it in his hand, Thakur very devotedly eats some and touches a little to his forehead. Before eating, he takes off his sandals. He says to M., "Very nice prasad."

It is Friday, 6 November 1885, the Amavasya[1] of the month of Aswin. Kali's worship will be performed today.

Thakur had asked M. to offer morning worship to Mother Siddheshwari Kali at Thanthania – with flowers, green coconut, sugar and sandesh. After taking a bath, M. had gone barefoot to the puja and offered worship. He has now come to Thakur, still barefoot, with the prasad.

Thakur had also asked him to purchase books of the songs of Ramprasad and Kamalakanta to give to Doctor Sarkar.

M. says, "I have brought the books. They have the songs of Ramprasad and Kamalakanta." Sri

[1] The darkest night of the month

Ramakrishna says, "All these songs shall enter his (Doctor Sarkar's) mind."

Song – O my mind, why are you reasoning so much about Him, like a mad man in a dark room?

It is an emotional matter. Can you catch it without emotion?

Song – Who knows what Kali is like? Even the six systems of philosophy[1] cannot give a glimpse of Her.

Song — O my mind, you do not know how to farm. This human land has remained unattended. If you had cultivated it, it would have yielded gold.

Song – Come, O mind! Let us go for a walk.

At the foot of the wish-fulfilling tree of Kali, you will get the four fruits – righteousness[2], wealth[3], fulfillment of desires[4] and liberation[5].

M. — Yes, sir.

Thakur paces the room with M. He has slippers on his feet. He is so sick, but his face is beaming.

Sri Ramakrishna — This song is nice too: 'The world is a veil of deception.' And the other one, 'This world is a mart of joy. Come, brother, let us enjoy ourselves in the mart.'

M. — Yes, sir.

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[1] Six Systems of Hindu Philosophy: Samkhya of Kapila, Yoga of Patanjali, Vaiseshika of Kanada, Nyaya of Gautama, Purva Mimamsa of Jaimini, and Vedanta of Badarayana
[2] Dharma
[3] Artha
[4] Kama
[5] Moksha

Thakur's body suddenly jerks. He at once takes off his slippers and stands motionless. He enters into deep samadhi. It is the day of the worship of the Mother of the Universe. Is it because of this that he frequently starts and goes into samadhi? After a long time, he exhales a long breath, as if it were with great difficulty that he controls his ecstatic state.

Chapter II

With devotees on the Kali Puja day

Thakur is seated with the devotees in the same second floor room. It is ten o'clock. He is seated on the bed, leaning against a pillow. Devotees sit around him: Ram, Rakhal, Niranjan, Kalipada, M. and many others. The topic of conversation is Hriday Mukherji, a son of Thakur's sister.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ram and others) — Hriday is still talking about land. When he was in Dakshineswar, he said, 'Give me a shawl or I will take you to court.'

"The Divine Mother removed him. Whenever visitors came, he would ask them for money. Had he continued to stay, all those people would have stopped coming [to Dakshineswar]. The Mother took him away.

" 'Go[1]' also began to act like that. He began to find fault with others. If he was to accompany me in the carriage, he would delay our departure. He would become upset when other young men would come to see me. If I went to Calcutta to visit them,

[1] Reference to Rakhal, through his association with Sri Krishna as gopal, a cowherd boy

he would say, 'Are they going to renounce the world that you go to see them?' Before giving refreshments to everyone, I would say to him out of fear, 'Eat, and give some to them.' It seemed to me that he would not stay.

"Then I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, don't take him away altogether like you did Hriday.' Later I heard that he was going to Vrindavan.

"If 'Go' had stayed on at that time, none of these young men would have come to me. When he went to Vrindavan, the boys started visiting me."

'Go' (humbly) — Sir, that was not in my mind.

Ram Dutta — Can you understand your mind as he can?

'Go' remains silent.

Sri Ramakrishna (to 'Go') — Why do you behave this way? I love you more than a father loves his child.

"Now keep quiet. You no longer have that attitude."

After talking with the devotees, when they had gone to the other room, Thakur called 'Go' and asked him, "Are you thinking about something?"

'Go' — No, sir.

Thakur says to M., "It is the Kali Puja day. It would be nice to make some arrangements for the worship. Go tell the devotees. Ask them if they have brought a stalk of jute for fuel."

M. goes to the parlour and speaks to the devotees about it. Kalipada and the others begin to make arrangements for the worship.

The Doctor comes to see Thakur at about two o'clock. A teacher named Nilmani is with him. A number of devotees are seated around Thakur: Girish, Kalipada, Niranjan, Rakhal, Khoka (Manindra), Latu, M. and others. After talking a little to the Doctor about his sickness and medicine, Thakur smiles and says to him, "We have these books for you."

M. gives both books to the Doctor.

The Doctor wants to hear some songs. At Thakur's request, M. and another devotee sing some songs of Ramprasad –

Song – How can you, O my mind, know His essence, groping like a mad man in a dark room?

Song – Who knows what Kali is? Even the six systems of philosophy cannot give a glimpse of Her.

Song – O my mind, you do not know how to farm.

Song – Come, my mind! Let us go for a walk.

The Doctor says to Girish, "Your song is good – the one about the vina. It is from Buddha's life."

Thakur beckons Girish and Kalipada to sing. They chant the song –

This is my beloved vina, in which I have intertwined a garland of strings.

He who plays the vina carefully, ever gets nectar from it.

If you are able to sing a song of inspiration having a nice musical note, sweet melody flows out in a hundred streams.

The vina does not play music by stretching or breaking its soft string, or by loosening a string.

Song – I want peace. Where can I get it?

Where have I come from and to what do I swim?

I go and return repeatedly. How much I laugh and weep!

So I ask myself, where should I go?

Who is making me play? And why should I play at all?

Even though I am awake, I am asleep – as if by a spell.

What darkness is this? Will there ever be a dawn?

I am running ceaselessly, like a strong current of wind.

I do not know who has come from where, why he has come, and where he is being taken.

I swim and swim, and reach so many countries. A din of the cries of distress surrounds me.

So many come and go, laughing and singing – now they are here, then they are not.

What has brought me here and what work have I engaged myself in? Who knows what play is being staged.

Can the current of water stop? Where am I to go? Is there no bank?

O Consciousness, make me conscious!

Who is conscious? When will this dream of mine end?

If you have become awakened, do not sleep again. This deep darkness is very frightening.

Dispel the darkness, Lord! And bring light, O Lord.

Except for You, there is no way, so I pray for refuge at Thy feet.

Song –

Hold me, Nitai. Today my soul is writhing terribly.

Nitai is now ready to give Hari's name to all embodied beings.

It is like a wave rising on the river of ecstatic love; and I am now sinking into this wave.

Nitai, to whom shall I convey my inner feelings of distress?

I am becoming immersed in the sorrows of embodied souls.

Song –

Come, let us call 'Hari, Hari' with a heart full of devotion.

Come on, Jagai and Madhai, let us dance.

Song –

Come, let us enjoy the intense love of the teen-aged Radha. A tide of intense love is flowing!

Love is flowing in a hundred waves. One receives as much as one wants.

The lass of ecstatic love is heartily dispensing love of her own will.

Call out 'Hari' in the intense love of Radha.

She intoxicates my soul with ecstatic love.

She makes one dance on the wave of prema. Come, come on, in the love of Radha, call out 'Hari'!

Two or three devotees go into ecstasy listening to the songs – among them are Khoka (Manindra) and Latu, who had been sitting beside Niranjan. After the songs

are over, Thakur talks with the Doctor about other things. The previous day, Pratap (Majumdar) had given the medicine nux vomica to Thakur. Hearing this, the Doctor becomes upset.

The Doctor — I am not dead yet! Why nux vomica?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — No, let only your avidya[1] die.

The Doctor — I have never had avidya.

The Doctor takes avidya to mean a woman of easy virtue.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — Oh, no. Mother ignorance[2] of a sannyasin dies giving birth to discrimination[3] as her son. When mother ignorance dies giving birth to the son, impurity [because of the death] develops in the house. So they say that the sannyasin must not be touched.

Hariballav enters. Thakur says to him, "I am happy to see you." Hariballav is a very humble person. He takes his seat on the bare floor, not the mat, and then fans Thakur. He is a noted attorney in Cuttack.

Nilmani, the teacher, is seated nearby. Thakur, out of consideration for him, says, "It's a great day for me today." After awhile, the Doctor and his friend, Nilmani, leave. Hariballav, who is also leaving, says, "I shall come again."

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[1] Ignorance
[2] Avidya
[3] Viveka

Chapter III

Worship of Sri Kali (worship of the Mother of the Universe in the person of Thakur)

It is Amavasya in autumn, time 7:00 p.m. All arrangements for the worship have been done in the same second floor room. The devotees have brought Thakur flowers of different kinds, sandal paste, vilwa leaves, hibiscus flowers, milk pudding and sweets of various kinds. Thakur is sitting, surrounded by devotees: Sarat, Sashi, Ram, Girish, Chunilal, M., Rakhal, Niranjan, the Younger Naren, and Behari among others.

Thakur says, "Bring some incense." After awhile he offers all the articles to the Mother of the Universe. M. is seated close to him. Thakur glances at him and says, "All of you, meditate for awhile." They all meditate for some time.

Soon after, Girish offers a garland of flowers at Thakur's feet. M. also offers flowers and incense. He is followed by Rakhal. Ram, too, offers flowers at his feet.

Niranjan offers flowers at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, chanting, 'Brahmamayi, Brahmamayi,' and prostrates himself touching his head to Sri Ramakrishna's feet. They all repeat, "Victory to the Mother! Victory to the Mother!"

In no time, Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi. How wonderful! The devotees see an amazing transformation. Thakur's face is resplendent with celestial light. Both of his hands grant fearlessness to the devotees. His body is motionless and he has lost outer consciousness. He sits facing north. Has the Mother of the Universe Herself manifested Herself through him?

Everyone is speechless gazing at this wonderful form of the Mother of the Universe granting fearlessness to Her devotees.

They now chant a hymn of praise. Each of them sings the hymn individually, and then in unison.

Girish sings the following hymn –

Who is this woman of the colour of dark blue clouds in the celestial assembly of gods?

Who is She, standing with both red lotus feet on Shiva's chest?

Who is She whose toe-nails shine with the light of the moon?

Her feet shine as so many suns. Her face is radiant with a soft smile, but then She thunders in a loud voice.

He sings the following song as well –

You redeem the helpless, You are the Saviour from one's sins, and You contain the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas.

You, who create, preserve and dissolve, are with form as well as Formless, O my Mother. You are indeed manifested in all forms.

You, Yourself, are Kali, Tara and the great Primordial Power.

You, Yourself, incarnate as avatar in the form of a fish, a tortoise and a boar.

You, Yourself, are earth, water, fire and air.

You, Yourself, are ethereal space, You indeed are Mother of the Absolute.

The votaries of the systems of philosophy of Samkhya, Patanjali, Mimamsa and Nyaya,

Think of You alone and meditate on You.

Vaisheshika and Vedanta are confused and have not been able to know You until now.

In order to comprehend You, spiritual aspirants define you with beginning and end, and identify You with adjuncts.

Taking up the five forms of Ganesha and others (Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Bhavani and Ganesha), You are able to deceive *Kala* and dispel the fears of the world.

You are always present in the three periods of time: past, present and future.

For the votary of God with form, You manifest with form.

And for the worshipper of the Formless, you manifest without form.

Some say that Brahman is all-illumining. You are that daughter of the mountain.

When a person transcends his mind, he calls you Parabrahman.

After this is the state of Turiya, which is beyond speech.

You are all, O Mother Tara – immanent in the three worlds.

Behari now chants this hymn –

O my Mother, seated on a corpse, listen to my prayer.

O Mother, when they perform my *antarjali*[1] (at death), please appear before me.

Then I'll pick hibiscus flowers from the forests of my heart.

[1] The Hindu rite of keeping immersed the lower part of the body of a dying person in a holy river

And Mother, mixing them with the sandal paste of divine love, I will make an offering of them at Your feet.

Mani sings, accompanied by the devotees –

All is Your will, O Mother Tara! You are free to will.

You do all works in the world, Mother! People say that they do it.

You mire the elephant in mud and make the lame cross hills.

To some You grant the seat of Indra, and others You take downward.

I am the machine and You are the operator.

I am the house and You are the resident.

I am the chariot and You are the charioteer.

I move as You make me move.

Song –

By Your compassion, O Mother, people are going across and being liberated.

Unsurpassable obstacles like mountains – all hurdles – are removed.

You are the mine of blessings – You are always dispensing goodness.

Why, then, am I worried so about the good or bad result of anything?

Song –

O Mother! You are the very image of joy and bliss. Pray do not rob me of my happiness.

Song –

O my Mother! Your effulgent form shines forth in pitch darkness.

Thakur comes down to normal consciousness. He asks for the following song to be sung –

Song – In what moods do you remain, Mother Shyama, the river of nectar?

The song over, Thakur asks for this song to be sung –

Song – The Divine Mother is lost in an ecstasy of joy in the company of Shiva.

Though She staggers, She does not fall.

Thakur takes a little farina pudding to make the devotees happy but, suddenly overwhelmed with divine emotion, he loses outer consciousness.

After some time the devotees all salute him, take some prasad, and go to the parlour. They eat the prasad there, full of joy. Thakur sends word that the worship of Kali would be performed tonight at Surendra's house and that they should go there to participate.

Enjoying themselves on the way, the devotees reach Surendra's house on Simla street. With affection, Surendra takes them upstairs to the parlour. He asks them to be seated. The atmosphere is one of celebration, with everyone singing or playing a musical instrument.

It is past midnight before they take prasad and return home.

Section XXIII

With Devotees at the Cossipore Garden House

Chapter I

Narendra's yearning for the Lord

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in the second story room of the Cossipore garden house. He is telling M. that Ram Chatterji had come from the Dakshineswar Kali Temple to enquire after his health. He asks M. whether it is very cold at Dakshineswar.

It is Monday, 4 January 1886. 21st of Pausha, the 14th day of the dark fortnight, 4:00 p.m.

Narendra comes in and sits down. Thakur glances at him from time to time and smiles – it is as though he were beside himself with love and affection for Narendra. He tells Mani with a sign, "He wept." Thakur remains quiet for awhile. Then he says by signs to Mani that Narendra had cried all the way from home.

Everyone is silent; then Narendra speaks –

Narendra — I am thinking of going there today.

Sri Ramakrishna — Where?

Narendra — To Dakshineswar. Tonight I will light a fire under the bel tree and meditate.

Sri Ramakrishna — No. Those people (the proprietors) will not allow it. The Panchavati is a

nice place. Many sadhus have practiced the repetition of God's name and meditation.

"But it is very cold there, and dark."

Everyone is silent. Thakur continues.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra, smiling) — Won't you study?

Narendra (looking at Thakur and Mani) — I wish I had some medicine that would make me forget everything that I have studied.

The Elder Gopal is there. He says, "I will go with him." Kalipada Ghosh had brought a box of grapes for Thakur; it is lying beside him. He distributes the grapes to the devotees. First he gives some to Narendra, then to Hari. Then he pours them on the floor so the devotees may gather as many as they like.

Chapter II

Narendra's yearning for the Lord and his intense dispassion[1]

It is already evening. Narendra, sitting downstairs smoking, tells Mani privately how his soul is yearning for the Lord.

Narendra (to Mani) — I was meditating here last Saturday. Suddenly there was a strange sensation in my chest.

[1] Vairagya; non-attachment to things of the world

Mani — Waking of the Kundalini!

Narendra — It must be that. I clearly perceived the Ida[1] and the Pingala[2] nerves. I asked Hazra to place his hand on my chest to feel the sensation.

"Yesterday, Sunday, I went upstairs to see him [Sri Ramakrishna] and told him about it.

"I said, 'Everyone else has attained realization; please give me some. Everyone else has attained it. Should I be the only one not to succeed?' "

Mani — What did he say to you?

Narendra — He said, 'Please come here after settling your family affairs. You will get everything. What do you want?'

Sri Ramakrishna and the Vedanta – accept both the Absolute and the phenomenal

"I said, 'I want to remain absorbed in samadhi for three or four days. I want only to rise now and then to eat a little food.'

"He said, 'You are very small-minded! There is a state higher than this! Don't you yourself sing, "You are all that is"?' "

Mani — Yes. He always says, 'He Himself has become all that you see when you come down from samadhi – He Himself has become the universe and its living beings. A God-man[3] can attain that state.'

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[1] A spiritual column of nerves on the left of the spinal cord
[2] A spiritual column of nerves on the right of the spinal cord
[3] *Ishvarakoti*

He says, 'If an ordinary human being[1] attains samadhi, he cannot come down from it.'

Narendra — He said, 'Go and settle things in your household. It is possible for you to attain a state higher than samadhi.'

"I went home this morning. Everybody began to scold me. They said, 'Why are you roaming around creating confusion? Your law examination is very near and you don't study. Instead you roam around aimlessly.' "

Mani — Did your mother say anything?

Narendra — No. She wanted to feed me. There was venison. I ate it, though I didn't feel like it.

Mani — And then?

Narendra — I went to the home of my grandmother to study. When I began to read, I felt a peculiar pain, as if studies were something frightful. My chest began to palpitate wildly! I have never wept so bitterly!

"I threw the books away and ran out onto the road. My shoes fell off somewhere. I ran close to a haystack and got covered with hay. I kept running down the road to Cossipore."

Narendra is silent for awhile. Then he continues.

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[1] *Jivakoti*

Narendra — I have begun to feel worse since reading the *Vivekachudamani*. Shankaracharya says that three things – human birth, the desire for liberation, and the refuge of a great spiritual soul – come to one if he has done great spiritual practice and is very fortunate.

"I began to reflect: I have indeed achieved all three things. As a result of great austerities, I have been born as a human being; as a result of the same, I have developed the desire for liberation; and it is because of so much spiritual practice that I have been able to meet a great saint."

Mani — Ah!

Narendra — I don't like worldly life any more. I don't like those who live a worldly life – except for one or two devotees...

Narendra suddenly stops talking. He has developed intense dispassion. His heart is pining for God. He continues –

Narendra (to Mani) — You have attained peace, while my soul is so troubled! You are indeed blessed.

Mani is silent. He does not reply. He reflects: Thakur said, 'One must yearn for the Lord, only then does one attain His vision.' Soon after dusk, Mani goes to the room upstairs. He finds Thakur asleep.

It is about 9:00 p.m. Niranjan and Sashi are sitting beside Thakur, who is now awake. Every now and then he talks of Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna — How wonderful Narendra's state of mind is! You see, in the beginning this same Narendra did not accept God with form. Do you see how his heart is pining for the Lord now? Someone asked his guru, 'How can one realize God?' The guru said, 'Come with me, I'll show you in what state He can be attained.' Saying this, he took the disciple to a pond where he immersed him and held his head under water. After some time he released the disciple and asked him, 'How did you feel?' The disciple said, 'I felt I was going to die!' It is like this with Narendra.

"When one's heart pines for God, know that God-realization is not far away. At dawn – when the eastern sky is red – one knows that the sun is soon going to rise."

Thakur's condition is worse today. He is suffering so much – yet he talks of all these things about Narendra, though mostly in signs.

Narendra has gone to Dakshineswar tonight. It is pitch dark – the beginning of the Amavasya[1]. One or two devotees have gone with him. Mani is staying for the night at the garden house. He dreams that he is seated among sannyasins.

Chapter III

Intense dispassion of the devotees – living in the world and suffering in hell

The next day is Tuesday, 5 January, 22nd day of Pausha. The Amavasya lingers for a long time. It is

[1] The darkest night of the month

four o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on his bed. He is talking to Mani alone.

Sri Ramakrishna — If Kshirode goes on pilgrimage to Gangasagar, please buy him a blanket.

M. — Yes, sir.

Thakur is quiet for awhile. He resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna — Well, can you tell me what is happening to these young men? One is running to Sri Puri[1], while the other is going on pilgrimage to Gangasagar.

"They are all renouncing their homes and coming here. Look at Narendra. When such intense dispassion develops, the world appears to be a deep well and one's relatives as venomous snakes."

Mani — Sir, there is so much suffering in the world.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is the suffering of hell – from the moment of one's very birth! Don't you see what trouble it is to have a wife and children?

Mani — Yes, sir. And you also said that those people (who have not entered family life) owe nothing to the world and expect nothing from it. Others remain entangled in the world to satisfy their expectations and carry out their obligations.

[1] Kshetra

Sri Ramakrishna — Have you observed Niranjan? His attitude is, 'Take what is yours, and give me what is mine' – that's all. He has no further relationship with the world. He has no attachment to it.

"Indeed 'lust and greed' is worldly life. Just see, if one has money, one wishes to keep it."

Mani bursts out laughing. Thakur laughs too.

Mani — One calculates so much before taking the money out. (Both of them laugh.) But you said at Dakshineswar that one lives in the world very differently if one has gone beyond the three gunas[1] [sattva, rajas and tamas].

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, one becomes like a child.

Mani — True, sir. But it is exceedingly difficult. It requires a great deal of will power.

Thakur is silent for awhile.

Mani — Yesterday when they had gone (to Dakshineswar) to meditate, I had a dream.

Sri Ramakrishna — What did you dream?

Mani — I dreamt that Narendra and some others had become sannyasins. They were sitting around a fire. I, too, was seated with them. They were

[1] *Trigunatita*

puffing tobacco smoke. I said that it smelled like Indian hemp[1].

Who is a sannyasin? Thakur's pain and the state of a child

Sri Ramakrishna — It is enough if one renounces in the mind. That too makes one a sannyasin.

Thakur doesn't say any more. Then he talks about other things.

Sri Ramakrishna — But one has to set fire to one's desires. Only then can one succeed.

Mani — You said to the pundit of the Marwaris from Burrabazar that you had the desire for love and devotion to God. Perhaps the desire for bhakti is not to be counted as a desire.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is like hinche leaves, which are not counted as greens. Hinche controls an excess of bile.

"Well, there was so much joy and ecstasy before. Where has all that gone?"

Mani — I feel that you have attained the state of *trigunatita*[2], spoken of in the *Gita*. Sattva, rajas and tamas are performing their functions, but you, yourself, are unattached. You are not even attached to the sattva guna.

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[1] Ganja
[2] Beyond the three gunas

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, I have been kept in the state of a child.

"Well, will my body survive this illness?"

Thakur and Mani remain silent. Narendra comes up from downstairs. He is going home and will return after settling family affairs.

Since the death of his father, Narendra's mother and brothers have been in great difficulties. At times they don't have enough to eat. Narendra is their only hope. He has to take a job and provide them food. But he has not been able to take his law examination because he is in a state of intense dispassion. He is going to Calcutta today to make arrangements for his family. A friend of his will lend him hundred rupees. That will take care of their rations for three months.

Narendra — I am leaving for home now. (To Mani) I am going by way of Mahima Chakravarty's home. Would you like to come with me?

Mani doesn't want to go. Thakur looks at him and asks Narendra, "Why?"

Narendra — I am going that way. I will visit him and chat for awhile.

Thakur looks intently at Narendra.

Narendra — A friend who comes here has said he would lend me hundred rupees. I am going to arrange for the needs of my family for three months with this amount.

Thakur is silent. He looks at Mani.

Mani (to Narendra) — No, you go on. I will go later.

Section XXIV

Sri Ramakrishna at the Cossipore Garden House with His Intimate Companions

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna has taken up a body for the sake of his devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is staying at the Cossipore Garden House. It is evening. Thakur is not well. He is sitting in the second story hall facing north. Both Narendra and Rakhal are gently stroking his feet. Mani is seated close by. Thakur beckons him to also gently massage his feet. Mani does so.

It is Sunday, 14 March 1886, 2nd of Chaitra and the 9th day of the bright fortnight in the month of Falgun. On the previous Sunday, worship was performed in the garden in commemoration of Thakur's birthday. Last year, his birthday was celebrated at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple with grandeur. This time he is ill and the devotees are drowned in a sea of grief. They performed worship, but with little celebration.

The devotees are always present at the garden house to serve Thakur. The Holy Mother is engaged around the clock attending him. Many of the young devotees stay with him: Narendra, Rakhal, Niranjan, Sarat, Sashi, Baburam, Jogin, Kali, Latu and others.

The older devotees stay here occasionally, but they come almost daily to have his darshan and to enquire about his health. Tarak and Gopal of Sinthi are here all the time, as well as the Younger Gopal.

Thakur is particularly unwell today. It is midnight on the 9th day of the bright fortnight. The whole garden appears lit up with joy by the moon's light. Thakur is suffering intense pain, so the sight of the pure rays of the moon does not bring joy to the hearts of the devotees. They feel as though they were in a very beautiful town that is being besieged by enemy troops. Except for the rustling of leaves by the touch of a spring breeze, it is completely silent. Thakur lies on his bed in the hall upstairs. His suffering is great. He cannot sleep. One or two devotees sit silently, close to him to attend to his needs. He is feeling sleepy at times and seems to doze off.

Is it slumber, or mahayoga[1] – the state wherein established, he is not shaken even by the heaviest affliction[2]? Is he in the state of communion with God?

M. is seated nearby. Thakur beckons him to come closer. Even stones would melt to see Thakur's suffering. With great difficulty he whispers to M., "I am undergoing all this suffering because you people will weep otherwise. This mortal frame will go if you all say, 'He is suffering so much; let his body go.' "

These words rend the hearts of the devotees. That he who is their father and mother, he who protects and provides for them, should say this! They are all silent. Some of them think to themselves, "This is crucifixion – sacrificing the body for the sake of the devotees."

It is dead of night and Thakur's disease is getting worse. What can be done? A messenger is sent to Calcutta. Girish brings Doctor Upendra and Navagopal Kaviraj that very night.

The devotees are seated close to Thakur. Feeling slightly better, he says, "The body certainly

[1] Supreme yoga experience

[2] Yasminsthito na duḥkhena guruṇāpi vicālyate (Gita 6:22)

has to undergo suffering. But I clearly see that it is made up of the five elements[1]."

Looking at Girish, he says, "I am seeing so many forms of God. This (his own) is among them."

Chapter II

In samadhi

The morning of the next day, Monday, 15 March 1886, 3rd day of Chaitra, time about seven or eight. Thakur's health is a bit more stable. He talks to the devotees in whispers and signs. Narendra, Rakhal, M., Latu, Gopal of Sinthi and others are sitting with him.

The devotees have no words. They sit silently in deep grief, remembering the state of Thakur's health the previous night.

Thakur has visions – the Lord, creatures and the universe

Sri Ramakrishna (gazing at M., to the devotees) — Do you know what I see? God has become everything – human beings and all the other creatures that I see. They appear to be made of leather, while He Himself, from inside, moves the hands, the feet and the heads. It is the same as I once saw before – houses, gardens, garden paths all made of wax. Also cows, everything – all made up of the same wax material.

"I see that God Himself is the executioner, the sacrificial victim and also the sacrificial block."

[1] Earth, water, fire, air and ether

What is Thakur saying? That, after being deeply aggrieved for humanity, he is sacrificing his body for them?

"The Lord Himself has become the executioner, the sacrificial victim and the sacrificial block." While saying this, Thakur is overcome with divine emotion and exclaims, "Ah! Ah!"

Again he enters samadhi, losing all outer-consciousness. The devotees sit silent, not knowing what to do.

Returning to partial consciousness, Thakur says, "Now I am not suffering at all. I am my former self."

Seeing this state beyond happiness and sorrow, the devotees are wonderstruck. Gazing at Latu, Thakur says –

"This Loto is sitting with his head resting on his hand. I see the Lord Himself sitting there with His head resting on His hand."

Thakur looks at the devotees and his heart seems to melt with love and affection for them. He caresses Rakhal and Narendra as one does little children, by touching and stroking their faces with his hand.

Why there is an end to Sri Ramakrishna's divine sport

After awhile Thakur says to M., "Had this body lasted a few days more, many people would have been illumined." He is silent again.

He resumes, "God is not going to preserve it."

The devotees wonder what Thakur is going to say next. Then he repeats, "God will not preserve this body lest – everyone knows me to be guileless and foolish person – I might give away spiritual wealth to all, simple person that I am. The fact is that in the

age of Kali, people don't practice meditation and repetition of God's Name."

Rakhal (lovingly) — Please speak to God, that He may preserve your body.

Sri Ramakrishna — That would only be if the Lord wills.

Narendra — Your will and the Lord's will have become one.

Thakur is silent for awhile, as if reflecting on something.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra, Rakhal and the others) — But then, nothing will happen, even if I say so.

"I see that it has all become one. In fear of her sister-in-law, Radha said to Krishna, 'Please dwell in my heart.' But later on, when she yearned for a glimpse of Krishna, a yearning like that of a kitten which continues scratching its paws, He did not come out of her heart."

Rakhal (to the devotees, in a sweet voice) — He is talking about the incarnation of God as Gauranga.

Chapter III

Secret talk – Sri Ramakrishna and his intimate companions

The devotees sit motionless and silent. Thakur looks at them lovingly and places his hand on his heart. What is he going to say?

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra and the others) — They are both inside this [meaning Sri Ramakrishna]: One, He Himself…

The devotees wait to hear what he is going to say next.

Sri Ramakrishna — One, He Himself – and the other, the devotee. The devotee broke his arm and it is he who is suffering from illness. Do you understand?

The devotees sit silently.

Sri Ramakrishna — Whom shall I tell? Who will understand what I say?

After awhile, Thakur speaks again.

"He incarnates as a human being, as God-incarnate, and is accompanied by devotees [intimate companions]. The devotees depart with him."

Rakhal — 'But please don't leave us now!'

Thakur smiles sweetly and says, "A troupe of bauls[1] came out of the blue – they danced, they sang, and then they suddenly left. They came and then left. No one recognized them." (Thakur and the devotees smile momentarily.)

After remaining silent for few moments, Thakur speaks again –

"When one takes up a body, there is bound to be suffering.

"I say time and again, 'May I not have to return [to the mortal world]!'

"Even so, the fact remains that one does not enjoy a meal of urada lentils and rice at home after having enjoyed a feast.

"Besides, this assuming of a human body is for the sake of the devotees."

Is Sri Ramakrishna saying that he enjoys the offerings and the invitations of the devotees? That he enjoys himself in their company?

Narendra's knowledge, and love and devotion for God – Narendra's renunciation of the world

Thakur looks lovingly at Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra) — A pariah was carrying a load of meat. Shankaracharya passed that way after a dip in the Ganges. The pariah suddenly touched him. Shankara became upset and said, 'You have touched me!' The pariah replied, 'Lord, neither have I touched you, nor you me.

[1] Minstrels

Please reflect: Are you the body, or the mind, or the intellect?' Reason out what you are. The pure Atman remains unattached to everything. It is not stained by any of the three gunas, sattva, rajas, or tamas.

"Do you know what Brahman is like? He is like the air. There are smells, both good and bad, in the air. The air, however, is not affected by them."

Narendra — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — Brahman is beyond the three gunas and beyond maya – He is beyond the power of nescience[1] and also beyond the power leading toward God[2]. 'Lust and greed' are nescience. Knowledge, dispassion and love and devotion for God – all these are the splendours of power leading Godward. Shankaracharya kept the 'maya of knowledge'. The feeling of concern that you and these people entertain for me is indeed the 'maya of knowledge'.

"Following the path of the 'maya of knowledge' step by step, one attains the knowledge of Brahman. 'The maya of knowledge' is like the last few steps of the stairs. Only the roof remains beyond. Some people like to climb up and down the staircase even after reaching the roof. They retain the 'ego of knowledge' even after attaining the knowledge of Brahman – in order to instruct mankind, to taste the bliss of divine love, and to enjoy the company of devotees."

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[1] Avidya maya
[2] Vidya maya; maya of knowledge

Narendra and the other devotees are silent. Is Thakur describing his own state of mind?

Narendra — Some people get angry with me when I talk of renunciation.

Sri Ramakrishna (in a sweet voice) — But renunciation is necessary.

Pointing at parts of his body, Thakur says, "When an object is covered with another object, don't you have to remove the top object to get the lower one? Can you reach one without removing the other?"

Narendra — Right, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna (sweetly, to Narendra) — When one sees that everything is filled with God, can one see anything else?

Narendra — Does one have to renounce the world?

Sri Ramakrishna — As I said, what else can one see after having the glimpse of everything filled with God? The world is not visible then.

"But one must renounce in the mind. No one who comes here is a worldly person. Some of them had a slight desire – to live with women. (Rakhal, M. and others smile a little). That desire is now fulfilled."

Narendra and the heroic attitude[1]

Thakur looks lovingly at Narendra and becomes completely filled with joy. Glancing at the devotees, he says, "Wonderful!" Narendra smiles and asks Thakur, "What is wonderful?"

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — You are renouncing very nicely.

Narendra and the devotees look silently at Thakur. Rakhal then speaks.

Rakhal (smiling, to Thakur) — Narendra understands you pretty well.

Thakur laughs and says, "Yes, I have noticed that there are many others, too, who understand me." (To M.) "Am I right?"

M. — Yes, sir.

Thakur gazes at Narendra and Mani. With his finger he draws the attention of the other devotees to them. At first, he points at Narendra and then at Mani. Rakhal has understood Thakur's hint and speaks –

Rakhal (smiling, to Sri Ramakrishna) — You are saying that Narendra has the heroic attitude, while he [M.] that of the handmaid of God. (Thakur laughs.)

Narendra (smiling) — He [M.] doesn't talk much and is timid. Is that why you say that?

[1] The fearless attitude of burning faith

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to Narendra) — Well, what about my attitude?

Narendra — You have both attitudes, the heroic as well the attitude of handmaid of God.

Who is Sri Ramakrishna?

Thakur becomes filled with ecstasy when he hears this. Placing his hand on his chest, he mutters –

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra and the other devotees) — I see that whatever exists has emerged out of this.

He asks Narendra by a sign what he has understood.

Narendra — Every created object has come from within you.

Sri Ramakrishna (joyfully, to Rakhal) — Did you hear what he said?

Thakur asks Narendra to sing a song. Narendra hums a tune and then sings. He is in a mood of renunciation:

Transitory is human life, like drops of water dancing on lotus leaves,

The company of a holy man even for a moment serves as a boat to take one across the sea of this world.

When he has sung a couple of lines, Thakur says to Narendra by a sign, "What is this? What is this? It is a very ordinary idea."

Now Narendra sings a song expressing the attitude of a gopi.

O, my friend, where has the divine lover of Vraja gone? Do you not see that the separation from Him will kill me?

Artless daughter of a milkman as I am, He has forgotten me and made love to others more beautiful than I!

Who knew, my dear friends, that a lover so tender, so divine, would go begging for external beauty.

Fool I was to have forgotten myself at the sight of His heavenly beauty and to have held His feet fast to my throbbing bosom!

O, now I must consign this body to a watery grave in the Jamuna! Or take poison and put an end to my miserable existence!

Or give me a creeper from the woods to fasten round my neck; let me thus die by hanging from a young Tamal tree, dark brown like Him;

Failing all this, let me repeat day and night the sweet name of the beloved: Shyam[1], Shyam, Shyam, Shyam, and stop not until this body ceases to breathe.

Hearing the song, Thakur and the devotees are deeply touched. Tears of divine love roll down Thakur's and Rakhal's cheeks. Narendra is intoxicated with the love of the gopis of Vraja. He sings another song, humming its tune like a devotional hymn –

O, my beloved! O beloved, mine!

What do I say to you, O what do I say?

(Foolish woman that I am and never a favourite of Fortune)

You are the mirror to be held by my hands, You are the flower for my head!

O, I shall make You a flower and wear You in my hair.

[1] A name of Sri Krishna

I shall hide You, hide You, O my beloved, under my braided hair.

Worn under the hair, no one shall see You.

O, You are cooling collyrium for the eyes.

You are the betel leaf chewed with nuts and sweet fragrant spices for the mouth.

I shall make You, O my beloved, my Shyam, collyrium for the eyes, and thus wear You.

They shall think I have painted my eyes with dark-brown pigment and shall not find You.

You are the cool fragrant sandal paste for the body, and the necklace for the neck.

I shall cool, O my Beloved, my body, mind and soul with You, my dark-brown sandal paste!

And I shall make You my necklace and wear You round my neck and on my bosom and next to my heart.

To the body, You are life! To the house, You are the one thing that one cannot do without.

To me, O my Beloved, You are verily what wings are to the bird – what water is to the fish.

Section XXV

Sri Ramakrishna at Cossipore Garden House with Narendra and other Devotees

Chapter I

The Buddha and Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna is living with devotees at the Cossipore Garden House. Today is Friday, five o'clock, 9 April 1886, the fifth day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra.

Narendra, Kali, Niranjan and M. are sitting on the floor talking.

Niranjan (to M.) — I hear that Vidyasagar is going to start a new school. Why don't you try to arrange some employment there for Narendra?

Narendra — I have had enough of service under Vidyasagar.

Narendra has just returned from Bodh-Gaya, where he saw an image of Buddha. He had become merged in deep meditation before it. A new tree has grown up in the same spot as the bodhi-tree under which the Buddha had practiced austerities and attained nirvana. He saw it while he was there. Kali says, "One day Narendra sang a song at Umesh Babu's house in Gaya, to the accompaniment of a drum. He sang a kheyal, a dhrupada and so forth."

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on a bed in the hall. A good part of the night has elapsed. Mani is sitting

with him alone, fanning him. Latu comes in and sits down.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — Please bring a chadar[1] and a pair of slippers.

Mani — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Latu) — The chadar is worth ten annas, and then there is the pair of slippers. How much will both of them cost?

Latu — One rupee ten annas.

Thakur asks Mani by a sign to note the price.

Narendra comes in and sits down. Sashi, Rakhal and one or two other devotees also come in and take their seats. Thakur asks Narendra to gently massage his feet.

Sri Ramakrishna asks Narendra by a sign, whether he has had anything to eat.

Was the Buddha an atheist? 'The state beyond theism and atheism'

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling, to M.) — He went there (to Bodh-Gaya).

M. (to Narendra) — What did the Buddha believe in?

[1] A long piece of cloth worn over the upper part of the body, often draped as a shawl

Narendra — He could not express in words what he attained from spiritual practices. So everybody says he was an atheist.

Sri Ramakrishna (by signs) — Why an atheist? No, he was not an atheist. It is only that he could not express his experience in words. Do you know what a Buddha is? To become one with bodha (enlightenment) by continually meditating on it – to become transformed into Pure Intelligence Itself.

Narendra — Yes, sir. There are three classes of buddhas: the Buddha, the Arahat and the Boddhisattva.

Sri Ramakrishna — This is indeed God's play – a new and special divine sport.

"Why should he be an atheist? It is a state between 'is' and 'is not' in which one realizes one's own Real Self."

Narendra (to M.) — It is the state in which contradictions meet. Hydrogen and oxygen produce refreshing water; the same hydrogen and oxygen are used in the Oxy-hydrogen blowpipe.

"It is the state in which both the performance of work and the renunciation of work is possible – in other words, it is performing *nishkama* karma, or work without the desire for its fruits.

"Worldly people who are involved with sense objects believe in the 'existence' of the universe, while the Mayavadins, illusionists, believe that

nothing exists. Buddha's state was beyond 'existence' and 'non-existence'."

Sri Ramakrishna — 'Existence' and 'non-existence' are the attributes of prakriti (nature). Reality is beyond both 'existence' and 'non-existence'.

The devotees remain silent for awhile. Thakur speaks again.

Narendra and the kindness and dispassion of the Buddha

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra) — What did Buddha say?

Narendra — He did not comment on whether God 'exists' or not. He only preached compassion.

"A hawk took hold of a bird and was about to eat it. The Buddha cut a piece of flesh from his own body and gave it to the hawk to save the prey's life."

Sri Ramakrishna is again silent. Narendra talks more about the Buddha with great enthusiasm.

Narendra — Oh, what dispassion! Though Buddha was a prince, he renounced everything. What can those who possess nothing, who have no riches, renounce?

"After attaining nirvana, Buddha once visited his home and persuaded his wife and son and other members of the royal family to adopt a life of dispassion. What renunciation he had! Compare this with the conduct of Vyasadeva, who dissuaded

Shukadeva from giving up the world. He said to him, 'Son, practice religion as a householder.' "

Thakur is silent. He still does not comment.

Narendra —Buddha did not believe either in divine power[1], or in love and devotion for God[2]. He sought only nirvana. What dispassion! When he sat under the bodhi-tree to meditate, he said, 'ihaīva śuṣyute meṁ śarīram.' In other words, if I do not attain nirvana, then let my body dry up here. Such firm resolve!

"Indeed, it is the body that is mischievous! Is it possible to do anything without bringing it under control?"

Sashi — But you say that eating meat develops sattva. You insist that meat-eating is good.

Narendra — I eat meat just as I relish eating rice. I can eat rice alone, even without salt.

After awhile, Sri Ramakrishna talks. By signs, he enquires about the Buddha.

Sri Ramakrishna — Did Buddha have a tuft of hair on his head?

Narendra — No, sir. He has hair that looks like strings of rudraksha beads coiled a number of times on top of his head.

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[1] Shakti
[2] Bhakti

Sri Ramakrishna — And his eyes?

Narendra — His eyes are lost in samadhi.

Direct vision of Sri Ramakrishna: 'I am indeed He'

Thakur is silent. Narendra and the other devotees have fixed their eyes on him. Suddenly he smiles a little and begins to talk again to Narendra. Mani is fanning him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra) — Well, don't you have everything here – lentil pulse, gram pulse and even tamarind?

Narendra — After experiencing all those states, you are staying on a lower plane now.

Mani (to himself) — He is in the state of a devotee now – after living all the states.

Sri Ramakrishna — It is as if someone keeps pulling me down to a lower plane.

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna takes the fan from Mani's hand and resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna — The way I see this fan directly in front of me, in exactly the same way, I have the sight of God. And I have also seen…

Saying this, Thakur brings his hand over his heart and says to Narendra by a sign, "Tell me what I said."

Narendra — I have understood it.

Sri Ramakrishna — Let me see what you heard

Narendra — I didn't hear you clearly.

Sri Ramakrishna repeats with a sign, "I have seen that He (the Lord) and the Being who resides within the heart are one and the same person."

Narendra — Yes, yes. Soham (I am He).

Sri Ramakrishna — But there is a thin line dividing the two – (the ego of the devotee) so that I may enjoy the divine play.

Narendra (to M.) — When a great soul attains salvation, he continues to live in the world for the welfare of mankind. He retains his ego, and his body is subjected to pleasure and pain.

"For instance, consider the work of a porter. People like us do the work of a porter under compulsion, but great souls work willingly as porters."

Sri Ramakrishna and grace of the Guru

Everyone is silent again. Sri Ramakrishna, the ocean of motiveless grace, speaks again. He is explaining to Narendra and the others more about himself.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Narendra and the other devotees) — One can see the roof, but it is very difficult to climb onto it.

Narendra — Yes, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — But if someone has already reached the roof, he can pull another person up with a rope.

Five kinds of samadhi of Sri Ramakrishna

"A sadhu from Rishikesh visited here. He said to me, 'How wonderful! I have seen five kinds of samadhi in you.'

"At times, it is like a monkey: The spiritual current jumps like a monkey in the tree of the body, from one branch to another, leading to samadhi.

"At other times it is like a fish: Just as a fish swims swiftly in water, the spiritual current moves up inside the body and brings about samadhi.

"And sometimes it is like a bird: Like a bird it is sometimes on this branch of the tree of the body and sometimes it hops to another branch.

"At times it is like an ant: The spiritual current creeps up slowly within like an ant. When it reaches the Sahasrara (the thousand-petalled lotus in the top of the head), one attains samadhi.

"And sometimes it is like a snake: In other words, the spiritual current moves in a wriggling motion like a snake and brings about samadhi when it reaches the Sahasrara."

Rakhal (to the devotees) — Let us stop. There has been too much conversation. It will aggravate his illness.

Section XXVI

Sri Ramakrishna at the Cossipore Garden House with his Intimate Companions

Chapter I

At Cossipore Garden house with devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is lying on his bed in the second story room of the Cossipore Garden house. Sashi and Mani are in the room. Thakur asks Mani by a sign to fan him. He does so.

It is 5 or 6 o'clock in the afternoon on Monday, 12 April 1886; Sankranti of the month of Chaitra, the day of the worship of Vasanti Mahalakshmi; the eighth day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra, 31st Chaitra.

There is a fair in this residential neighbourhood celebrating the last day of the Bengali year with a special worship of Shiva. Thakur had sent a devotee to buy some articles there. He has returned.

Sri Ramakrishna — What have you brought?

The Devotee — Sugar drops worth a pice, a vegetable knife[1] worth two pice and a spoon worth two pice.

Sri Ramakrishna — What about the [other] knife?

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[1] Large knife fixed at right angle on a piece of wood used to cut vegetables and fish

The Devotee — He would not sell it for two pice.

Sri Ramakrishna (excitedly) — Please go quickly and buy it.

M. is strolling around downstairs. Narendra and Tarak have returned from Calcutta. They visited Girish Ghosh's house and other places.

Tarak — Today we ate a lot of meat and other heavy food.

Narendra — The mind has gone down a great deal. Let us practice some austerity.

(To M.) "What slavery to the body and the mind! We are just like porters. As if the body and the mind do not belong to me, but to someone else."

It is getting dark. Light has been brought to the upper room, as well as to other parts of the house. Thakur is sitting on the bed facing north. He is contemplating the Mother of the Universe. After some time Fakir, who belongs to the family of Balaram's priest, recites from the holy book the hymn, 'Dissolver of sins[1],' which addresses the Divine Mother. He is sitting in front of Thakur.

I suffered great distress in the womb of my mother before I was born.

But even after being born, I did not take refuge at Your feet, nor did I worship them.

Though born again and again, I didn't take You as my refuge, nor did I serve You.

Formidable Goddess, pray excuse my sins.

[1] *Apradha bhanjan*

Sashi, Mani and one or two other devotees are in the room.

The recitation of the hymn is over. Sri Ramakrishna bows down with folded hands in a mood of great devotion and reverence.

Mani is fanning him. Thakur says to him by a sign, "Please bring a stone bowl for me." With his hand he indicates the shape of the bowl to Mani. Then he says, "It should hold a quarter litre of milk. And it should be white stone."

Mani — Right, sir.

Sri Ramakrishna — When I eat vegetable soup in other bowls, it smells of fish.

Chapter II

Does an *Ishvarakoti* bear the result of his actions? Is he bound by destiny? Yogavashishtha

The next day, Ram Naomi, Tuesday, 13 April 1886, the first of Vaishakh. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on his bed in the second story room. It is between 8 and 9 in the morning. Mani had stayed the night. He took a dip in the Ganges in the morning, then came to Thakur and prostrated before him. Ram Dutta also came and saluted Thakur, then took his seat. Ram has brought a garland of flowers, which he offers to Thakur. Most of the devotees are downstairs; only one or two are present in Thakur's room. Ram is talking to Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Ram) — How do you find me?

Ram — You have everything in you. Soon the conversation will be your illness.

Sri Ramakrishna smiles and asks Ram by a sign, "The topic will be my illness?"

Thakur's slippers pinch his feet. Doctor Rajendra Dutta asks him for the measurement of his feet so he can get slippers made to fit. The measurement is taken[1].

Sri Ramakrishna asks Mani by a sign, "What about the stone bowl?" Mani rises at once. He wants to leave for Calcutta to buy one.

Sri Ramakrishna says, "Please don't bother now. Leave it."

Mani — Sir, these devotees are going to Calcutta. I can go with them.

Mani buys a white stone bowl from a shop in the new market at the Jorashanko crossing. It is already midday when he returns to the Cossipore Garden House. He comes to Thakur to salute him and places the bowl before him. Thakur looks at the white stone bowl and holds it in his hand. Dr. Rajendra Dutta, Dr. Sreenath, Rakhal Haldar and several other devotees come in. Dr. Sreenath holds a copy of the *Gita* in his hand. Rakhal, Sashi, the Younger Naren and the other devotees are in the room. The doctors hear the news of Thakur's illness.

Dr. Sreenath (to his friends) — We are all subject to prakriti. Nobody can evade the fruit of his actions! One has to reap the *prarabdha*[2]!

Sri Ramakrishna — Why, when one repeats God's Name, meditates on Him and surrenders to Him…

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[1] These slippers are worshipped in the Belur Math now

[2] Stored-up karma from past lives which has begun to bear fruit in the present life

Dr. Sreenath — Sir, where will the effect of *prarabdha* go – the effect of one's actions of so many earlier births?

Sri Ramakrishna — Certainly one must, to some extent, reap the fruit of one's actions. But by virtue of the repetition of God's Name, a lot of the bondage of actions is dispelled. Maybe one had to be born blind in seven births because of his actions of previous births. But after a dip in the Ganges, which brings liberation, maybe this fellow remained blind for the rest of his life, but he was not born another six times.

Dr. Sreenath — But, sir, the holy books say that there is no way to free oneself from the result of one's actions. (Dr. Sreenath was ready to argue.)

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mani) — Please tell him that there is a great deal of difference between an *Ishvarakoti* and a *jivakoti*[1]. An *Ishvarakoti* does not commit any sin. Why don't you say this to him?

Mani remains silent. He says to Rakhal, "Please talk to him about this."

After awhile the doctors leave. Thakur talks to Rakhal Haldar.

Haldar — Dr. Sreenath studies the *Vedanta*. He reads the *Yogavashishtha*.

[1] An ordinary human being

Sri Ramakrishna — It is not good to live as a householder and still hold the view that 'everything is like a dream'.

A Devotee — Kalidasa says, 'That fellow, too, discusses the *Vedanta*, but he has lost all his wealth in a law suit.'

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling) — To say that it is all maya and then to sue in a court of law? (To Rakhal) Mukherji of Janai also used to talk big, but later he understood. If I were well, I would talk to him [Dr. Sreenath] a little longer. Can one attain divine knowledge just by repeating 'knowledge, knowledge'?

Sri Ramakrishna's hair stands on end when he notices those who have conquered lust

Haldar — I have heard so many things about divine knowledge, but now all I need is a little love and devotion for God. The other day I came to you with a question. You have answered it.

Sri Ramakrishna (eagerly) — What was it?

Haldar — Sir, when this young man arrived, you said that he had mastered his senses.

Sri Ramakrishna — Yes, my dear. Worldly thoughts have not entered into him at all. He says he doesn't know what lust is.

(To Mani) "Touch me. The hair of my body is standing on end."

Reminded of such a pure state devoid of the least trace of lust, the hair on Thakur's body stands on end. God is present where there is no lust. Is Thakur being inspired by God-consciousness thinking of this?

Rakhal Haldar takes his leave.

Sri Ramakrishna is still sitting with the devotees. A crazy woman creates a row, insisting on seeing him. This woman entertains the attitude of a lover[1]. She often visits the garden house and suddenly rushes up to Thakur's room. Even when the devotees beat her, she doesn't stop.

Sashi — I will push her out if the 'crazy woman' comes again.

Sri Ramakrishna (in a voice full of compassion) — No, my dear. Let her come. She will leave by herself.

Rakhal — Before, I would feel jealous when I saw so many other people visiting him. But he was kind enough to make me realize that my guru was the Guru of the whole world. Has he incarnated just for our sake?

Sashi — No, not at all, but why bother him when he is sick? She causes such a row!

Rakhal — Well, everyone creates some kind of row. Have all the visitors who have come to him attained perfection before coming? We do not harm them. Narendra and others – what were they like when they first came? How many arguments Narendra used to raise!

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[1] *Madhura* bhava

Sashi — Whatever Narendra said, he carried out in action.

Rakhal — How much Dr. Sarkar argued! On test, no one is without guilt.

Sri Ramakrishna (affectionately, to Rakhal) — Will you eat something?

Rakhal — I won't eat now.

Sri Ramakrishna is asking Mani with a sign whether he will eat here today.

Rakhal — Why don't you? He is asking you to.

Thakur is sitting with the devotees naked, like a child of five. Just now the crazy woman climbs up the stairs and stands at the door.

Mani (in a whisper to Sashi) — Ask her to bow to him [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] and leave. There is no need to say anything more.

Sashi sends the crazy woman downstairs.

It is the first day of the new year. A number of women devotees have arrived. They offer salutations to Thakur and the Holy Mother and receive their blessings. The wives of Balaram and of Manomohan and the Brahmin woman of Baghbazar are among them. Some of them have brought their children.

The women devotees come to the second story room to pay their respects to Thakur. Some of them offer flowers and vermilion powder at the lotus feet of Thakur. Two girls, nine or ten years old, sing a hymn to Sri Ramakrishna –

Song –

I want to attain peace. But where can I find it?

Where have I come from and to where am I floating away?

I go and come back time and again; I cry and laugh so much.

O brother, I am always asking myself where I should go.

Song –

O my vina, chant the name of Lord Hari.

Song –

Look, O young lady! He is coming before you, He who has slanting eyes and holds a flute in his hand[1].

Song –

O my tongue! Ever repeat the name of Durga.

Who but She will save you during trials and tribulations?

Sri Ramakrishna says by signs, "O my Mother! How beautifully she sings!"

The brahmin woman has the nature of a child. Thakur laughs and says to Rakhal by a sign, "Why don't you ask her to sing?" The brahmin woman sings. The devotees smile.

O Hari! I shall play with You today.

I have found you alone today in the Nidhu grove [at Vrindavan].

The two girls go downstairs.

[1] Meaning Sri Krishna

It is evening. Mani and a couple of devotees are sitting near Thakur. Narendra enters the room. As Sri Ramakrishna rightly says, Narendra appears as if he is carrying an unsheathed sword when he moves about.

Hard disciplines for the monk and Narendra

Narendra comes in and sits beside Thakur. He expresses his aversion to women within Thakur's hearing. He says that keeping the company of women is a serious obstacle to God-realization.

Sri Ramakrishna doesn't say anything; he just listens to Narendra.

Narendra continues, "I want peace. I don't even care for God." Sri Ramakrishna stares at him without saying a word. Narendra chants, "Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, the Infinite."

It is 8:00 p.m. Thakur is sitting on his bed. A couple of devotees are sitting in front of him. Surendra has come to see him after completing his office work. He brings four oranges and two flower garlands. First he gazes at Thakur and then at the devotees. He tells them what is in his heart.

Surendra (glancing at Mani and the others) — I have come from the office after finishing my work. I said to myself, 'I shouldn't stand on two boats at the same time. I had better finish my work before going there.' Today is the first day of the year[1] and it is also Tuesday[2]. Yet I didn't go to Kalighat. I thought, it would be enough to see him who is Kali Herself and who has rightly known Kali.'

Sri Ramakrishna smiles a little.

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[1] Vaishakh
[2] An auspicious day for worshipping the Divine Mother

Surendra — I have been told that one should take flowers and fruits when one visits the guru or a sadhu. That is why I have brought these things. I have spent money for you; God alone sees into one's mind. There are some who feel uncomfortable when they have to spend even a pice for the sake of God. And there are some who do not mind spending a thousand rupees. God sees the devotion in a devotee's heart and accepts the offering.

Thakur nods his agreement that Surendra is right. Surendra adds, "I couldn't come to see you yesterday, the last day of the year[1]. But I decorated your picture with flowers."

Sri Ramakrishna tells Mani by a sign, "Oh, what love and devotion!"

Surendra — I bought these two garlands for you on my way here. They cost four annas.

Almost all the devotees have left. Thakur asks Mani to gently massage his feet and to fan him.

[1] Sankranti

Appendix

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna's first monastery – dispassion and spiritual practices of Narendra and other devotees

Baranagore Math. Narendra and other devotees have gathered together after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna. Surendra's holy desire has made it possible to provide a home for them in Baranagore. It is now transformed into a monastery. Gurudeva Sri Ramakrishna is daily served and worshipped in a shrine. Narendra and other devotees have resolved not to return to worldly life. They say, "How can we return home when he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] asked us to renounce 'lust and greed'?" Sashi has taken up the responsibility of the daily worship of Thakur. Narendra is looking after his brother disciples, who look to him for guidance. Narendra has said, "We will have to practice spiritual disciplines, or it will not be possible to realize God." He, with his brother disciples, have taken up the practice of a variety of spiritual disciplines. They have initiated themselves into various austerities described in the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and the *Tantras* to rid the mind of any kind of backsliding in the future. In practicing spiritual disciplines, they sometimes sit alone under a tree, at other times singly in the cremation ground, and at times on the bank of the Ganges. They spend the day in repetition of the Name and in meditation, sometimes in the monastery in the meditation room. At times, they join together in joyfully dancing and singing hymns. Everybody, Narendra in particular, yearns to realize God. Sometimes he says, "Shall I starve myself to death to see God? By what means can I attain Him?"

Latu, Tarak and the Elder Gopal did not have homes to return to. Surendra rented the first monastery in their name, saying, "Brothers, establish Thakur's shrine here and we will all visit you from time to time for peace and solace." Fired with the spirit of dispassion, the young devotees soon moved in, never to return home.

Narendra, Rakhal, Niranjan, Baburam, Sarat, Sashi and Kali were the first to stay there. Subodh and Prasanna joined them after a few days. Jogin and Latu were in Vrindavan, but they joined a year later. Gangadhar frequently visited the monastery. He could not live without seeing Narendra. He introduced the arati hymn, 'Jai Shiva Omkara[1]' to the monastery. From time to time the brothers of the monastery also sang the victory chant, 'Victory to the Guru.' It was taught to them by Gangadhar as well, when he returned from Tibet. Two other devotees of Thakur, Hari and Tulsi, used to visit the monastery regularly to see Narendra and the others. After a few days they, too, stayed.

Reminiscences of Narendra and Sri Ramakrishna's love for him

Friday, 25 March 1887. M. has come with Devendra to see the brothers of the monastery. M. often comes to see them and sometimes even stays overnight. He came last Saturday and stayed for three days – Saturday, Sunday and Monday. The brothers of the monastery, particularly Narendra, are charged with an intense spirit of dispassion. That is why M. eagerly comes to see them so frequently.

It is late in the evening. M. will stay at the monastery tonight.

After dusk, Sashi lights a lamp in the shrine and burns incense, repeating the sweet name of the Lord. Taking the same incense, he goes to all the

[1] Victory to Shiva Omkara

rooms of the monastery and offers his obeisance to all the images in each room.

Sashi now performs arati. Folding their hands, the brothers of the monastery, M. and Devendra watch it and sing the arati hymn with him: Victory to Shiva Shankara, victory to Shiva Shankara! To Brahma, Vishnu and Sadashiva! Redeem, redeem, redeem, Mahadeva!

Narendra and M. are engaged in conversation. Narendra is telling M. his reminiscences of meetings with Thakur. Narendra is now 24 years and two months old.

Narendra — When I started visiting him, one day in ecstasy he said to me, 'So you have come!'

"I said to myself, 'How wonderful! He acts as though he has known me a long time.' Then he asked me, 'Do you see a light?'

"I replied, 'Yes, sir. Before I sleep, I sense a special light revolving near my forehead.' "

M. — Do you still see it?

Narendra — I used to see it frequently. Once in Jadu Mallick's dining room, Sri Ramakrishna touched me and said something to himself. I lost outer-consciousness. I remained in that intoxication for a month.

"Hearing that I was going to marry, he held the feet of the Mother of the Universe and wept. After weeping for a long time, he said, 'Mother, give a turn to this situation. Don't let Narendra sink!'

"When my father passed away, my mother and brothers didn't have enough to eat. During that time, one day I went to see him with Annada Guha.

"He said to Annada Guha, 'Narendra has lost his father. He is in great trouble. It would be good if his friends helped him with money now.'

"I was upset with him. After Annada Guha left, I asked him, 'Why did you say all that to him?' Thus rebuked, he began to weep and said, 'Oh, for you I can beg from door to door!'

"He conquered us by showering his love and affection."

M. — There is not the slightest doubt about it. His love was unconditional.

Narendra — One day when I was alone with him, he told me something – there was no one else present. Please don't tell this to anybody else.

M. — No, I won't. What did he say?

Narendra — He said, 'I cannot resort to occult powers. Let me do it through you. What do you say?' I told him, 'No. This cannot be done.'

"I used to contradict what he would say. You must have heard this from him yourself. He used to have visions of divine forms and I would say to him, 'All these are hallucinations.'

"He told me, 'Oh, I used to shout from the rooftop of the Kuthi, "Where are all you devotees? Come to me! I am about to die without seeing you

people!" The Divine Mother had told me that the devotees would come. See, everything She said is turning out to be true.'

"What could I say then? I just kept quiet."

Narendra is the abode of Indivisible[1] – Narendra's ego

"One day he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] closed the door to his room and told Devendra Babu and Girish about me, saying, 'If I tell him his true nature, he will quit his mortal frame.' "

M. — Yes, I heard that. He said it to us, too, a number of times. Didn't you once enter into such a state[2] when you were staying in the Cossipore Garden house?

Narendra — In the state I experienced, I had no body; I could only see my face. Thakur was in the room upstairs – I had the experience on the ground floor. I began to weep and said, 'What has happened to me?' The Elder Gopal went upstairs and told Thakur that I was weeping.

"When I saw him, he said, 'Now you have known, but I am keeping the key.' I asked what had happened to me.

"Glancing at the other devotees, he said, 'When he comes to know of his real Self, he will not keep his body. I am keeping him in ignorance.'

[1] Akhanda
[2] Nirvikalpa samadhi

"One day he said, 'You can see Krishna in your heart if you want.' I said, 'I know no Krishna or anyone like him.' (Narendra and M. laugh.)

"And then there is something peculiar. When I see some people or objects, sometimes I feel as if I have known them for many past lives – as if they are my acquaintances. When I went to Sarat's house on Amherst Street, I said to him, 'I feel as though I have known this house completely. The passages in the house and the rooms, I feel that I have known for many days.'

"If I did something of my own free will, he (Thakur) would never say anything to me. Did you know that I was a member of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj?"

M. — Yes, I knew it.

Narendra — He knew that girls also used to visit the Brahmo Samaj. A man cannot meditate when there are girls around, so he would criticize such a practice. But he would not say anything to me.

"But one day he said, 'Don't tell Rakhal that you are a member of the Samaj. He will then want to become a member too.' "

M. — You have greater will power. That is why he didn't forbid you.

Narendra — I have attained this state of mind after having faced so many trials and tribulations! Master Mahashay, you haven't had to face such troubles in life. I now think that without facing

trials and tribulations, one cannot resign oneself [to the will of God], attain absolute dependence on God.

"But how soft and lacking in ego you are! What humility! Would you please tell me how I can have humility?"

M. — About your ego, Thakur said, 'Whose ego is it after all?'

Narendra — What does that mean?

M. — A gopi friend[1] of Radhika told her, 'You have become proud. That's why you were rude to Krishna.' Another gopi friend said, 'Yes, it is true that Radhika is proud. But what is she proud of? She is proud that Krishna is her Lord. Krishna himself gave this pride to her.' This is what Thakur meant – that the Lord Himself has given you this ego so He can get a lot of work done through you.

Narendra — But I shout repeatedly from every corner that I have no troubles.

M. (smiling) — Yes, please shout to your heart's content. (Both of them laugh.)

Now the conversation turns to other devotees – to Vijay Goswami and others.

Narendra — He said about Vijay Goswami, 'He is knocking at the door.'

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[1] Sakhi

M. — In other words, he has not been able to enter the room yet.

"But Vijay Goswami said to Thakur at Shyampukur, 'I saw you in Dhaka in this form, in this very body.'

"You were there when he said this."

Narendra — Devendra Babu and Ram Babu will both renounce the world – they are trying very hard. Ram Babu says privately that he will give up the world after two years.

M. — After two years? After making provision for his sons and daughters perhaps.

Narendra — He might rent out his house and buy a small one for himself. Others will arrange his daughter's marriage and so forth.

M. — Isn't Gopal in a nice state of mind?

Narendra — What do you mean?

M. — He goes into such deep ecstasy – while chanting the name of God, the hair on his body stands on end and he sheds tears of joy.

Narendra — Does one become great by going into ecstasy?

"How much greater personalities are Kali, Sarat, Sashi and Sarada compared to Gopal! How great is their renunciation! Gopal does not accept him (Sri Ramakrishna), does he?"

M. — Even he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] said that Gopal didn't belong to his intimate circle of devotees. But I noticed that he had great love and devotion for Thakur.

Narendra — What did you notice?

M. — On my first visit to Dakshineswar, after the devotees had left Thakur's room, I saw Gopal when I came out of the room. With folded hands he was kneeling on the red brick-dust path before Thakur, who was standing there. The moon was shining brightly. It was on the red brick-dust path to the north of the northern veranda of Thakur's room. No one else was there. It seemed to me that Gopal had taken refuge and Thakur was reassuring him.

Narendra — I didn't see it.

M. — Thakur used to say now and then, 'Gopal is in the state of a paramahamsa.' But I also remember well that Thakur forbade him to visit women devotees. He cautioned him a number of times about this.

Narendra — Well, he told me, 'If Gopal is in the state of a paramahamsa, why does he keep money with him?' He also said, 'He doesn't belong to my inner circle of devotees. They who are my own will regularly visit me.'

"That is why he used to be cross with Babu. He was in the constant company of Gopal and didn't visit Thakur frequently enough.

"He told me, 'Gopal has attained spiritual perfection – perfection achieved suddenly. However, he doesn't belong to this intimate circle. Had he been my own, why did I not weep in yearning to see him?' Some people are claiming him as an incarnation of Nityananda. But Thakur said on several occasions, 'I am indeed Advaita, Chaitanya and Nityananda – all three in one receptacle.' "

Chapter II

Thakur instructs Narendra to teach mankind

Two devotees are sitting in Kali Tapasvi's room in the monastery. One of them is a householder, the other a monk. They are the same age – twenty-four or twenty-five. They are talking when M. arrives. He plans to stay in the monastery for three days.

Friday, 8 April, Good Friday. Time about eight o'clock. M. enters the room and then goes to Thakur's shrine to pay his obeisance. Later, he meets Narendra, Rakhal and other devotees. Then he comes and sits in this room, talking to both the devotees and listening to their conversation. The householder devotee has the desire to renounce family life. The brother of the monastery is trying to dissuade him.

The Devotee who has Renounced — Please finish the little karma that remains to be done. If you attend to it for a little while, it will end.

"A person was told that he would go to hell. He asked a friend what hell was like. The friend got a piece of chalk and began to draw hell on the ground. As soon as he had finished drawing it, the fellow rolled over it and said, 'I have now reaped my actions of living in hell.'

The Householder Devotee — I don't like worldly life. Oh, how happy you are here!

The Devotee who has Renounced — Why do you talk so much about it? Go out and enjoy the world to your fill.

Sashi performs worship in Thakur's shrine after nine o'clock.

It is about eleven o'clock. The brothers of the monastery return, after a dip in the Ganges. They put on clean cloths and enter the shrine one by one to pay obeisance to Thakur and to meditate.

After food has been offered to Thakur, the brothers of the monastery sit down to eat it. M. eats with them.

It is now twilight. Arati is performed after incense is burnt. Rakhal, Sashi, the Elder Gopal and Harish are sitting in the 'Demons' room[1]'. M. is also there. Rakhal asks that great care be taken while keeping Thakur's food.

Rakhal (to Sashi and the others) — One day I took my meal before Thakur ate. Looking at me, he said, 'I can't even look at your face! Why did you do such a thing?' I began to cry.

The Elder Gopal — Once at Cossipore I breathed heavily on his food. He said, 'This food cannot be eaten.'

M. is pacing the verandah upstairs with Narendra. They are talking about a number of things.

[1] The brothers of the monastery call themselves *danas* and *daityas* (ghosts and demons) and the room where they meet they call 'the room of the danas,' or the 'demons' room'

Narendra says, "You know very well that I didn't accept anything."

M. — Are you talking about the forms of God?

Narendra — In the beginning I didn't accept many of the things he said. One day he said to me, 'Then why do you come here?'

"I told him, 'I come here to see you, not to listen to your words.' "

M. — What did he say?

Narendra — He was very happy.

The next day, Saturday, 9 April 1887. After offering food to Thakur, the brothers of the monastery eat and then rest awhile. Narendra and M. sit along together under a tree in the garden to the west of the monastery and talk. Narendra tells M. the story of his meeting Thakur. Narendra is twenty-four, M. is thirty-two.

M. — You remember your first meeting with him very well, don't you?

Narendra — Yes. I met him in his room at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. I sang these two songs that day –

Song –

O my mind, return to Your abode.

Why are you wandering aimlessly in a foreign land – this world – in the guise of a foreigner?

The five senses[1] and the elements[2] are alien to you – none is your own.

Entangling yourself in the love and affection of strangers, why are you forgetting your near and dear One?

Take the path to Reality and light the lamp of intense love for God for a moment.

Preserve sacred wealth carefully and secretly.

The robbers – greed and infatuation – can rob you of your wealth.

O mind, guard yourself most carefully with sama[3] and yama[4].

The company of sadhus and the Name are like an inn on the road. Take rest there when you tire on the way.

If you lose your way, ask the residents of the inn for the directions.

If, on the path, you come across an image of fear, call on the King with your heart and soul.

On that path, the King wields great authority. Even Yama (God of death) fears His regime.

Song –

Will my life end in vain? O Lord, day and night I fervently gaze down the path of hope.

You are the Lord of the three worlds. And I am a beggar and an orphan.

How can I say to You to come and reside in my heart?

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[1] Form, taste, smell, sound and touch
[2] Earth, water, fire, air and ether
[3] Control of the mind
[4] Self-restraint. Patanjali cites five yamas or restrains. They are: (1) abstinence from injury in any form; (2) truthfulness; (3) continence; (4) non-stealing and non-covetousness; and (5) abstinence from possessiveness, accepting only what is absolutely necessary (ahimsa, satya, brahmacharya, asteya, aparigraha).

I keep the doors of the cottage of my heart open at all times.

Pray, come here once and bring peace to it.

M. — What did Thakur say after hearing the song?

Narendra — He went into an ecstatic mood. He asked Ram Babu and others, 'Who is this boy? He sang so beautifully!' Thakur asked me to come again.

M. — Where did you meet him the next time?

Narendra — At Rajmohan's house. And then again at Dakshineswar. When he saw me on that visit, he began to chant a hymn of praise for me, absorbed in ecstasy. Finishing it, he said, 'Narayana, You have come down in this body for me!'

"But please don't tell this to anybody."

M. — What else did he say?

Narendra — He said, "You have come down in a human body for my sake. I had said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, how can I go down to earth? With whom shall I talk? Mother, how can I live on earth without associating with pure devotees who have renounced 'lust and greed'?' " He also said, "You came here and woke me up one night. You said to me, 'I have come.' " I knew nothing of the sort. I was in deep sleep in my Calcutta house.

M. — In other words, you were present as well as absent at the same time – like the Lord is both with form and formless.

Narendra — But please don't tell this to anyone.

Thakur directs Narendra to teach mankind

Narendra — He transmitted spiritual power[1] to me at Cossipore.

M. — Is that when you used to meditate under the tree before a lighted fire – at the Cossipore garden house?

Narendra — Yes. I asked Kali to hold my hand for awhile. Kali said, 'What a shock traveled through my body when I touched you!'

"Promise that you won't tell this to anybody. Let it remain between us."

M. — There is a special reason for transmitting power to you. You will accomplish great work. One day he wrote on a piece of paper, 'Naren will teach humanity.'

Narendra — But I told him that I would do no such thing.

"He said, 'Your very bones will do it.' He made me responsible for Sarat. He has now developed

[1] Shakti

great yearning for God. His kundalini[1] has awakened."

M. — May dead leaves not now choke It. Thakur used to say – you perhaps remember – that fish make holes in the lake to rest in. When dead leaves accumulate in them, the fish can't stay there.

Narendra, the Abode of Indivisible

Narendra — He used to call me Narayana.

M. — I know he called you Narayana.

Narendra — During his illness, he would not let me pour water for washing his hands after evacuation.

"At Cossipore, he said, 'The key is with me. He will give up his body when he comes to know his real Self.' "

M. — Wasn't that the day you went into that state[2]?

Narendra — At the time I felt I had no body, that I only had a face. I was studying law at home to prepare for my examination. Suddenly it came to me, why was I doing all that?

M. — Was Thakur at Cossipore then?

Narendra — Yes. I came out of the house like a crazy person. He asked what I wanted. I said, 'I

[1] Spiritual energy lying dormant at the base of the spine
[2] Nirvikalpa Samadhi

would like to remain in samadhi.' He said to me, 'You are a man of very low intelligence! There is something beyond samadhi. Samadhi is much lower.'

M. — Yes, he would say, 'Vijnana is higher than jnana' – like going up and down a ladder after reaching the roof.

Narendra — Kali talks of jnana all the time. I scold him, saying, 'Why talk about knowledge? First let your love and devotion for God ripen and mature.'

"He told Tarak Babu at Dakshineswar, 'Spiritual emotion[1] and devotion[2] are by no means the last thing.' "

M. — Please tell me what else he said about you.

Narendra — He had such great faith in my words that when I said to him, 'The forms of gods and goddesses that you see are all hallucinations,' he went to the Divine Mother and asked Her, 'Mother, Narendra said all these things. Are they all delusions of the mind?' Afterwards he told me, 'The Divine Mother has said that all of them are true.'

"He said – perhaps you can remember – 'Hearing you sing, (placing his hand on his heart) what is here inside begins to steadily listen to it – like a snake hissing and raising its hood when it hears the snake charmer.'

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[1] Bhava
[2] Bhakti

"But Master Mahashay, though he said so many nice things about me, what have I attained spiritually?"

M. — You are now dressed as Shiva, so you don't have to touch money. Do you remember Thakur's tale?

Narendra — Please tell me.

M. — A quick-change artist was playing the role of Shiva in someone's house. The master of the house where he went offered him a rupee. He didn't accept it. He went home, removed Shiva's dress, and came back to ask for the rupee. The family asked him, 'Why didn't you accept it before?' He said, 'I was then playing the role of Shiva – a sannyasin – I couldn't touch money.'

Hearing this, Narendra laughed for a long time.

M. — You are now in the role of a physician. The whole responsibility is on your shoulders. You have to make men of all the brothers of the monastery.

Narendra — The spiritual disciplines that we practice are in accordance with his teachings. How strange that Ram Babu should taunt us about them. He says, 'We have seen him. What need is there to practice more spiritual disciplines now?'

M. — Let everyone act according to his belief.

Narendra — But he (Thakur) asked us to carry out spiritual practices.

Now Narendra talks more of Thakur's love.

Narendra — How much he pleaded with the Divine Mother for me! We had nothing to eat – after the death of my father. We were passing through extremely tough times in the house. At that time he prayed to the Divine Mother to give me money.

M. — I know. You told me about that.

Narendra — We didn't get the money. Thakur said, 'The Divine Mother says that coarse grain and cloth can be arranged – only rice and lentils can be granted.'

"He entertained so much love for me – yet if an impure idea came to my mind, he would immediately know about it. When I used to wander about with Annada, I sometimes associated with impure people. Then, when I went to see him, he would not take food from my hand. His hand would rise a little to take it and then stop. During his illness his hand reached close to his mouth, but not farther than that. He then said, 'You have not yet attained.'

"Many times I become skeptical about the existence of God. At Baburam's house, I felt that nothing exists – that no God, or anything like Him, exists."

M. — Thakur would say that he, too, used to have such moods at times.

Both of them are silent. M. says, "Blessed you all are! You think about Him day and night." Narendra

replied, "But I can't see Him! I don't yet have the desire to give up my body!"

It is evening. Niranjan has returned from holy Puri dham[1] a few moments ago. The brothers of the monastery and M. express joy to see him. He begins to tell them about his visit to Puri. Niranjan is 25 or 26 years old. After the evening worship, some of them are meditating. Since Niranjan has returned, many of them go and sit in the bigger room (the room of the Demons) to talk. At nine in the evening, Sashi offers food to Sri Thakur and puts him to bed.

The brothers of the monastery sit for their evening meal with Niranjan. They have chapati[2], a vegetable and some zaggery for their dinner. And then they have a little prasad of farina pudding.

[1] Place of pilgrimage
[2] Flat whole wheat bread

Section I

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple with Rakhal, Prankrishna, Kedar, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

At Dakshineswar with Prankrishna, M., and others

Sri Ramakrishna is seated with the devotees in his room at the Kali Temple. He remains intoxicated day and night with ecstatic love for God – with an intense love for the Divine Mother.

A mat is spread on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna comes and takes his seat on it. In front of him are Prankrishna and M. Rakhal is also in the room. Hazra is sitting outside on the southeastern verandah.

It is winter, the month of Pausha. Thakur has wrapped himself in a moleskin shawl. It is Monday at eight o'clock on the eighth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Agrahayana, 1 January 1883.

A number of devotees belonging to Thakur's inner circle have now come in contact with him. For more than a year Narendra, Rakhal, Bhavanath, Balaram, M., Baburam, Latu, and others have been visiting him regularly. Ram, Manomohan, Surendra, and Kedar had come a year earlier.

Almost five months ago Thakur had visited Vidyasagar's Badurbagan house. Two months ago he went with Keshab Sen on a pleasure trip by steamer to Calcutta. They were accompanied by Vijay and some Brahmo devotees.

Prankrishna Mukherji lives in Calcutta's Shyampukur locality. His ancestral home is in the village of Janai. He is a high government exchange officer who supervises auctions. Since he had no child from his first wife, he married a second time, with the former's consent. The second wife has given birth to a son. Prankrishna has great love and devotion for Sri Ramakrishna. Because he is rather stout, Thakur sometimes calls him "the fat brahmin." He is very good-natured. Some nine months ago, Thakur accepted his invitation to visit his home with the devotees. Prankrishna had prepared various dishes and sweets to offer him.

Thakur is sitting on the floor. Close to him is a basket of jilipis brought by a devotee. Thakur breaks off a piece and eats it.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Prankrishna, smiling*): "You see, I repeat the name of the Divine Mother, so I get all these things to eat. (*Laughter*.)

"But She doesn't give gourd and pumpkin. She gives the fruit of amrita, immortality – divine knowledge, intense love for God, discrimination, and dispassion."[1]

A young boy six or seven years old enters the room. Sri Ramakrishna is childlike. Just as a child conceals sweets from another child lest he should eat them, Thakur behaves in the same childlike manner. He covers the small basket of jilipis with his hand to conceal it and then pushes it aside.

Though Prankrishna is a householder,[2] he discusses Vedanta. He says, "Brahman is real and the world illusory. I am indeed He – So 'ham."

1. Jnana, prema, viveka, and vairagya.
2. Garhasthya.

Thakur says to him, "Life depends on food in the Kaliyuga. The path of devotion enjoined by Narada[1] is best suited to this age.

"God is a matter of the heart. How can He be held devoid of any feelings of the heart?"

As he is covering the sweets with his hand to conceal them, like a child, Thakur merges into samadhi.

Chapter II

In the domain of ecstasy and vision of divine forms

Thakur is in samadhi for a long time; he remains absorbed in ecstasy. His body does not move, his eyes are fixed. One is not sure if he is breathing.

He exhales a long breath, as if returning to the domain of the senses.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Prankrishna*): "God is not just formless. He has form too. You can behold His form. You can have the vision of His wondrous divine form through feeling, through love, through devotion for Him.[2] The Divine Mother reveals Herself in various forms."

Vision of Gauranga – Divine Mother in the form of Rati's mother

"I saw the Divine Mother yesterday. She wore an ochre garment with an unstitched hem. She talked with me for some time.

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1. Naradiya bhakti: self-surrender and loving devotion to God.
2. Bhakti.

"On another day She came to me in the form of a Muslim girl. She had the sectarian holy mark[1] on her forehead, and She was naked – a girl six or seven years old. She walked with me and joked and chatted like a child.

"When I was at Hriday's house, I had the vision of Gauranga. He wore a black-bordered cloth.

"Haladhari used to say, 'God is beyond being and non-being.' I went to the Mother and said, 'Mother, Haladhari says this. So are Your forms illusory?' The Mother came to me in the form of Rati's mother and said, 'You must remain in an ecstatic state.'[2] I told Haladhari what She said.

"Time and again when I forget Her command, I suffer. I broke my tooth when I was not in that state. So I will remain in an ecstatic mood until I hear a divine command directly or have a different experience. I'll follow the path of love for God. What do you say?"

Prankrishna: "Yes, sir."

Why does an incarnation of God entertain devotion? – it is Rama's will

Sri Ramakrishna: "But why should I ask you about it? There is someone within me who does all this through me. Sometimes I used to go into a divine mood when I could not be at peace without offering worship.

"I am the machine and He is the operator. I do as He makes me do. I speak as He makes me speak.

---

1. Tilak.
2. Bhava.

"Ramprasad, the poet, says:

I sail my boat in the ocean of the world.

I rise with the tide and subside with the ebb.

"During a storm a dry leaf is sometimes blown onto a clean surface and sometimes into a gutter. The wind carries it where it wills.

"The weaver said, 'It was by Rama's will that a robbery took place. It was by Rama's will that the police arrested me. And it was by Rama's will that I was set free.'

"Hanuman said, 'O Rama, You are my only refuge,[1] I surrender to You. Bless me that I may have pure love[2] for Your lotus feet and grant that I may never be enchanted by Your world-bewitching maya.'

"A bullfrog, at the point of death, said to Rama, 'Rama, when I'm seized by a snake, I shout for Your help, "Rama, protect me!" But since I'm dying now by Rama's own arrow, I can only stay silent.'

"Before, I used to see God with these physical eyes, the way I see you. Now I behold visions in ecstasy.[3]

"After realizing God, one develops the nature of a child. One acquires the nature of Him on Whom one meditates. God's nature is like that of a child. Just as a child builds a house, breaks it down, and then rebuilds it in play, in the same way God creates, preserves, and dissolves. Just as a child is

1. Sharanagata.
2. Shuddha bhakti.
3. Bhava.

not subject to any guna,[1] He too is beyond the three gunas of sattva, rajas, and tamas.

"That's why a paramahamsa keeps five or ten children with him – to absorb their nature."

A young man between twenty and twenty-two years old has come from Agarpara. Whenever he comes, he takes Thakur, by a sign, to a solitary corner and whispers his thoughts to him. He has only recently begun visiting Thakur. Today he is sitting on the floor near Sri Ramakrishna.

Feminine attitude[2] and conquest of lust – guilelessness and God-realization

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the young man*): "You can change your nature by imitating something. If you cultivate a feminine nature, you gradually slay enemies like lust. Then you begin to act just like a woman. Men who play the role of women in a religious theatrical performance,[3] begin to brush their teeth like women and talk like women when they bathe.

"Please come again, either on Saturday or Tuesday.

1. One of three types of universal energies: sattva, rajas and tamas.
2. Prakriti bhava.
3. Yatra.

(*To Prankrishna*) "Brahman and His Power[1] are one and the same. If you don't believe in His Power, the world becomes illusory for you. I, you, hearth and home, and the family – all of them become illusory. It is because of the Primordial Energy that the world stands firm. A framework can't be made without bamboo poles. You can't even make a beautiful image of Durga.

"A person can't attain spiritual awakening and realize God without getting rid of worldliness. Worldly desire leads to hypocrisy. God cannot be realized unless one is guileless at heart.

> Let go of cleverness and hypocrisy, and be sincerely devoted to God.
>
> Embracing service, worship, and self-surrender, you will easily attain Ragurai.[2]

"People who are engaged in worldly activities – in office work or some business – should also follow the path of truth. Truthfulness is the spiritual austerity in the Kaliyuga."

Prankrishna: "'On this spiritual path, one should speak the truth, control the senses, serve others unceasingly, remain steadfast, and be a refuge to others.'[3] This is what the Mahanirvana Tantra says."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, one must internalize all these qualities."

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1. Shakti.
2. A name for Rama.
3. asmindharme maheśi syāt satyavādī jitendriyaḥ।
paropakāranirato nirvikāraḥ sadāśayaḥ।।

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna's attitude in ecstasy akin to Yashoda's

Sri Ramakrishna goes to the smaller cot and sits down. Filled with God-consciousness, he looks at Rakhal.[1] In an ecstatic mood he becomes overwhelmed with maternal affection as he gazes at him. The hair on his body stands on end. Is he seeing Rakhal as Yashoda used to see baby Krishna?[2]

Thakur merges again into samadhi. The devotees sit speechless with wonder as they watch his marvelous state of God-consciousness.

Coming down a little to normal consciousness, Sri Ramakrishna says, "Why am I inspired at the sight of Rakhal? The more one advances towards God, the less one sees of His glories and splendour. A spiritual aspirant first beholds the vision of a deity with ten arms. There is a greater representation of splendour in this image. Then there is a vision of a two-armed deity – no longer holding weapons and missiles. Still later is the vision of Gopala. There is no show of power, only the form of a little child. Beyond that there is only divine light."

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1. Later Swami Brahmananda.
2. Gopala.

The state of brahmajnana after attaining samadhi – reasoning and attachment given up

"After realizing God and communing with Him in samadhi, all reasoning and discrimination disappear.

"How long does one reason? As long as there is the consciousness of plurality. You reason as long as you are aware of the world and its embodied beings, 'I' and 'you.' Attaining true knowledge, you become silent. Trailanga Swami[1] is like that.

"Haven't you seen a feast when brahmins are invited? The feast starts with a great uproar. As their stomachs are filled, the noise lessens. When curds with sugar drops are served, there is just the sound of 'sup sup' – no other sound is heard then. And when the feast is over, they go to sleep – that is samadhi. Then there is no sound at all.

(*To M. and Prankrishna*): "Most people talk about the knowledge of Brahman, but their minds are preoccupied with lower worldly things – home and hearth, money, name and fame, and sense pleasures. As long as you stand at the foot of the monument[2] you see carriages, horses, English men and women, and so on. But when you climb to the top of the monument, you see the vast expanse of sky and ocean. Then you don't enjoy the sight of buildings, carriages, horses, and people – they all appear to be so many ants.

---

1. Trailanga Swami was a famous monk in Benares who had taken a vow of silence. Sri Ramakrishna met him on his second pilgrimage there.
2. Ochterloney Monument in Calcutta.

"On attaining the knowledge of Brahman, attachment to the world and enthusiasm for 'lust and greed' vanishes. You attain perfect peace. A piece of burning wood produces a crackling sound and gives out heat. When it is consumed and has turned to ash, all sound ceases. As soon as you get rid of attachment, the restlessness for 'lust and greed' vanishes. Finally you attain tranquility.

"The nearer you come to God, the more tranquility you feel. Peace, peace, profound peace. The nearer you approach the holy Ganges, the cooler you feel. A dip in it is even more soothing.

"The world, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles[1] – these exist because God exists. Give up God and nothing remains. Adding zeroes to the digit *one* increases the number. But if you remove the one, the zeroes have no value."

Is Sri Ramakrishna hinting at his own state in his next words to be gracious to Prankrishna?

Sri Ramakrishna's state – the 'I of a devotee' after attaining the knowledge of Brahman

"After attaining the knowledge of Brahman – merging in samadhi – some people come down to a lower plane and live with the 'I of knowledge,' or

1. The twenty-four categories or cosmic principles enunciated in the Samkhya Philosophy are: mahat, cosmic intelligence; buddhi, the discriminating faculty; ahamkara, the sense of ego; manas, perceiving mind; chitta (mind-stuff), the recording faculty or memory; five organs of sense-perception (hearing, touch, sight, taste, smell); five organs of action (hands, feet, speech, organ of excretion, organ of generation);l five subtle elements (tanmatras – the potential of sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell), which, in differing combinations produce the gross elements (mahabhutas – ether/akasha/space, air, fire, water, and earth).

the 'I of devotion.' When the market shuts down, some people stay there of their own sweet will – for example, some like Narada, who retained the 'I of knowledge' to teach people.

"Even if only a little attachment to the world remains, one cannot realize Him. Just a little fibre sticking out from a thread keeps it from passing through the eye of a needle.

"One who has attained God retains only the appearance of passions like lust and anger – they're like a burnt string. There is the shape of a string, but it is blown away by a mere puff.

"God is seen when the mind is completely rid of attachment. Whatever rises in a pure mind is the voice of God. Pure mind is the same as pure intellect, and it is also the same as pure Atman. Except for God, there is nothing pure.

"Only by realizing God does one go beyond dharma and adharma."[1]

Saying this, Thakur sings a song of Ramprasad in his celestial voice.

> Come, O mind, let us go for a walk to Kali, the wish-fulfilling tree,[2] and gather there the four fruits of life.[3]
>
> Of your two wives, Worldliness[4] and Dispassion,[5] take only Dispassion along, and ask her eldest son, Discrimination, for the truth about Reality.[6]

---

1. Virtue and vice, righteousness and unrighteousness.
2. Kalpataru.
3. Four fruits: Dharma (virtue), artha (wealth), kama (legitimate desires), and moksha (liberation).
4. Pravritti.
5. Nivritti.
6. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section II, Chapter VI.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna in the mood of Radha

Thakur is sitting on the southeastern verandah of his room. Prankrishna and other devotees are with him. Hazra is also sitting on the verandah. Laughing, Thakur says to Prankrishna:

"Hazra is not an insignificant man. If one finds the big dargah[1] here [referring to himself], Hazra is a small dargah." (*All laugh.*)

Navakumar comes to the door of the verandah. At the sight of the devotees sitting there, he leaves. Thakur says, "The image of egotism."

It is about half past nine. Prankrishna salutes Sri Ramakrishna and takes his leave. He is going to his house in Calcutta.

In Thakur's room a renunciate sings a song to the accompaniment of a single-stringed instrument:[2]

Nityananda's ship is here.

Catch hold if you want to cross over.

Six handsome angels ever guard it,

Their backs and chests masked by shields.

Opening the main portal, they dole out precious jewels.

He sings another song:

Build your house now, for torrential rains will soon approach. Be prepared. Take ginger water;[3] be up and doing to construct it.

---

1. Burial place of a Muslim saint, considered sacred.
2. Gopiyantra.
3. Ginger helps in digestion.

When the month of Shravana[1] arrives, you'll not be able to see.

Bamboo and thatch will rot, and you will not be able to lay a roof.

With a gust of wind, the thatch will fly away, along with its frame,

Leaving a gaping hole.

You will look agape, and you will leave.

Once more he sings:

In what mood are you repeating Hari's name, while roaming about Nadia in pauper's garb, though you yourself are Hari?

I cannot comprehend why you have assumed this attitude and such behavior.

Thakur is listening to the songs when Kedar Chatterji enters and salutes him. He is in his office clothes, and wearing a cloak and a pocket watch and chain. Whenever he hears about God, his eyes fill with tears. He is a very loving soul and cherishes the attitude of the gopis of Vrindavan.

Seeing Kedar, Thakur is instantly inspired with the divine sport at Vrindavan. In a mood of ecstatic love, he stands up and sings, addressing Kedar:

Tell me, friend,[2] How far is that grove where my Shyamasundar is?

I cannot walk much farther.

Singing the song in the attitude of Sri Radha, Thakur enters into samadhi – he stands still like a

1. A time of incessant downpour during which visibility is very low.
2. Sakhi; gopi friend of Radha in Vraja and female lover of the Lord.

portrait. Tears of joy flow from both corners of his eyes.

Kedar kneels before him and, touching Thakur's feet, sings a hymn:

> I bow to Brahman-Consciousness, the primal seed of the universe, abiding in the lotus of the heart,
>
> Who, without attributes, rests in undifferentiated repose, known only to Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh,
>
> Who is attained only by yogis in the depth of meditation,
>
> Who removes the fear of life and death and is the essence of Knowledge and Truth.

After some time, Thakur returns to normal consciousness. Kedar was going to work in Calcutta from his home in Halishahar when he stopped to visit the Dakshineswar Kali Temple to see Thakur. After a little rest, he leaves.

While Thakur talks to the devotees, midday approaches. Ramlal brings Sri Ramakrishna a plate of Mother Kali's prasad. He eats the prasad facing south. Like a child, he takes a little of everything.

After eating, Thakur rests awhile on the smaller cot. Later the Marwari devotees[1] arrive.

Chapter V

Yoga of practice[2] – two paths: that of discrimination and that of loving devotion to God

It is three o'clock. The Marwari devotees sit on the floor and ask Thakur a few questions. M.,

1. Devotees from the Burrabazar district of Calcutta.
2. Abhyasa Yoga.

Rakhal and several other devotees are seated in the room.

A Marwari devotee: "Sir, what is the way?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are two paths: the path of discrimination and the path of fervent love for God.[1]

"Discrimination means differentiating between the real and the unreal. The only real or eternal Substance is God and everything else is unreal or impermanent. Only the magician is real, his magic is illusory. One must discriminate in this way.

"Discrimination and dispassion.[2] Differentiating between the real and the unreal in this manner is discrimination. Dispassion means a distaste for worldly things. This does not come about all of a sudden. It has to be practiced daily. To begin with, you have to renounce 'lust and greed' in the mind. Then, God willing, you can renounce them externally as well as internally. It is not possible to ask Calcutta people to renounce everything for the sake of God. You have to say to them, 'Renounce these mentally.'

"One is able to renounce the attachment to 'lust and greed' by the yoga of practice. The Gita says this. Practice brings extraordinary strength to the mind. Then you don't find it difficult to subdue the senses, to control passions like lust and anger. For instance, a tortoise doesn't bring out its limbs once

1. Anuraga.
2. Viveka and vairagya.

it has drawn them inside its shell, even if you cut it into four pieces with an axe."

The Marwari devotee: "Sir, you said that there are two paths. What is the other one?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is the path of ardent love for God. Weep for Him with a yearning heart, in solitude or in a secret corner, and cry to Him, 'Grant me Your vision!'

> Cry out with yearning, O mind, and see how Mother Shyama can withhold Herself from you![1]

The Marwari devotee: "Sir, what is the meaning of worshiping a form of God? And what is the meaning of God without form or attributes?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Just as you are reminded of your father when seeing his photograph, similarly, by continuously worshiping an image of God, you will have revealed to you in a flash His real nature.

"Do you know what the form of Reality is like? Just like bubbles rising on an expanse of water. Different forms arising in the subtle space of Consciousness,[2] in the Great Space[3] of Consciousness. An incarnation of God is one of such forms. As for the divine play of an incarnation, well, it's the sport of the Primal Energy."[4]

---

1. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section I, Chapter V.
2. Chidakasa.
3. Mahakasa.
4. Adyashakti.

Learning and scholarship – Who am I? I am none other than You

"What is there in learning and scholarship? You can attain God by calling upon Him with a yearning heart. Knowledge of different kinds is not essential.

"Religious teachers need to know many things; for killing others, you need a sword and a shield. To kill yourself, even a needle or a nail-knife will do.

"Who am I? When you try to discover that, you find God. Am I flesh or bone or blood or marrow – or am I the mind or intellect? Through such reasoning you ultimately see that you are none of these – 'not this, not this.'[1] The Atman cannot be touched or grasped. It is without attributes and qualities.[2]

"But according to the path of loving devotion, God has attributes. Krishna is Consciousness and His abode is Consciousness. Everything is Consciousness."

The Marwari devotees salute Sri Ramakrishna and take their leave.

Evening worship at Dakshineswar Temple

It is dusk. Thakur is watching the Ganges. A lamp is burning in his room. He chants the name of the Divine Mother and, sitting on the smaller cot, meditates on Her.

---

1. Neti, neti.
2. Nirupadhi.

In the temple, arati is being performed, and people strolling in the panchavati or on the embankment hear the sweet tones of the gong from a distance. The flood tide on the river flows northward with a soft murmuring sound. The music of the arati mingled with its murmur makes even a sweeter sound. Surrounded by such an atmosphere, Thakur sits intoxicated with love for God. Everything is sweet, the heart is filled with sweetness. Sweet, sweet, sweet.

Section II

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple with Rakhal, Ram, Nityagopal, Choudhury, and Others

Chapter I

Practicing spiritual discipline in a solitary place – philosophy – God-realization

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room with the devotees after the midday service. It is 25 February 1883.

Rakhal, Harish, Latu, and Hazra are living with Thakur these days. Ram, Kedar, Nityagopal, M., and other devotees, including Choudhury, have arrived from Calcutta.

Choudhury has recently lost his wife. He has visited Thakur many times to attain peace of mind. He has four university degrees and is employed as a government official.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ram and other devotees*): "Rakhal, Narendra, and Bhavanath are ever-perfect.[1] They have been spiritually awake since birth. They've assumed human bodies only to teach others.

"There's another class of devotees – those who are perfected by God's grace.[2] All of a sudden God's

1. Nityasiddha.
2. Kripasiddha.

grace descends on them and immediately they have His vision and spiritual wisdom. It is like a room which has been lying dark for a thousand years; the very moment a light is brought in, it is lit up. It is not lighted little by little.

"Those who are householders should practice spiritual disciplines. They should go to a solitary place and call upon God with a yearning heart. (*To Choudhury*) One cannot attain God by learning and scholarship.

"What can one comprehend of God by reasoning? Everyone must do whatever brings loving devotion to His lotus feet."

Bhishma Deva in tears – victory and defeat – divine eyes and the Gita

"Infinite are God's glories. How much can you grasp? Can one ever understand the ways of God?

"Bhishma Deva, who was one of the eight Vasus, even he began to shed tears lying on a bed of arrows. He said, 'How strange! The Lord [Sri Krishna] is a constant companion of the Pandavas, and yet there is no end to their trials and tribulations.' Who can understand God's ways?

"A person thinks, 'I have practiced a little prayer and austerity, so I have won.' But victory and defeat lie in God's hands. I saw a prostitute dying in the Ganges and retaining consciousness[1] to the end."

Choudhury: "How can one see God?"

1. It is considered by Hindus a sign of great spiritual merit and pious living.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Not with these eyes. God grants divine eyes, and then you have His vision. The Lord gave divine eyes to Arjuna in order to reveal His Universal Form.

"Your philosophy is mere calculating and speculation. It only reasons. You cannot attain God that way."

Ahetuki bhakti[1] – the main thing is to acquire zealous love and devotion for God

"If you have loving devotion – zealous love and devotion – God cannot remain unmoved.

"How great is God's fondness for devotion! It can be likened to a cow's fondness for fodder mixed with oil cake. She just gobbles it down.

"Fervent love[2] and selfless devotion to God, pure love for its own sake – that's what Prahlada had.

"You may visit a rich man just because you like to see him. When you're asked if you'd like a favour, you reply, 'Sir, I want nothing at all. I come just to see you.' This is called ahetuki bhakti. You ask God for nothing – only to love Him.

"Saying this, Thakur begins to sing:

> Though I[3] am not loath to grant liberation,[4] pure love I hesitate to give.
>
> Whoever wins pure love surpasses all, is adored by all;
> Such a one triumphs over the three worlds.

---

1. Spontaneous love for God.
2. Raga bhakti.
3. Sri Krishna.
4. Mukti.

Listen, O Chandravali,[1] I shall tell you of pure love: One may gain liberation, but devotion is rare indeed.

Out of love alone did I become King Bali's doorkeeper in the netherworld.

Only in Vrindavan can pure love be found.

None but the cowherd boys and milkmaids know its secret.

Out of love alone I dwelt in Nanda's house;

Taking him as My father, I carried his burden upon My head.

"The fundamental thing is to acquire passionate love[2] for God. And along with this, you must develop discrimination and dispassion."[3]

Choudhury: "Sir, is it not possible to succeed without a guru?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Sat-chit-ananda Himself is the Guru.

"After one has practiced spiritual disciplines on a corpse[4] and is about to attain the vision of the chosen deity,[5] the guru appears and says, 'See, here is your ideal.' And then the guru merges into it. The guru and the chosen deity are one and the same. The guru makes you hold the thread that leads to God. Spiritual aspirants take the 'vow of the Infinite,'[6] but perform the worship of Vishnu. In Him are the 'infinite' forms of God."

---

1. A gopi of Vrindavan.
2. Raga bhakti.
3. Viveka and vairagya.
4. Shava sadhana.
5. Ishta.
6. Anantavrata.

Harmony of religions according to Sri Ramakrishna

(*To Ram and other devotees*) "If you ask which form of God should be meditated upon, well you should meditate upon that form you like best. But you must keep in mind that all forms of God are one and the same.

"You must have malice toward none of the forms of God. Shiva, Kali, and Hari – all are indeed only different forms of one and the same God. Blessed is he who knows even one deity.

"Shiva on the outside, Kali in the heart, and Haribol on the lips.

"The body does not survive without a trace of lust, anger, and so forth. You should try to minimize them.

(*Thakur points to Kedar*) "He's right. He not only accepts the Absolute, but also God's divine sport. On the one hand, there is the Absolute and on the other, gods – even divine incarnations."

Kedar said that God had incarnated Himself in Thakur's body.

The sannyasin and woman – women devotees

Pointing at Nityagopal, Thakur says to the devotees: "He's in a very nice mood."

(*To Nityagopal*) "Don't go there too often – you may go once in a while. She may be a devotee, but she's also a woman. Do be cautious.

"There is a very strict rule for a sannyasin. He must not even see the picture of a woman. This doesn't apply to householders.

"Even if a woman is a great devotee, it's not right to associate with her too much. Even if a sannyasin has conquered his passions, this rule must be followed for teaching others.

"Seeing a sadhu renounce sixteen annas,[1] others will learn to renounce. Otherwise, they will sink. A sannyasin is a world teacher."

Thakur and the devotees rise and stroll about. M. stands before the picture of Prahlada and looks at it thoughtfully. Thakur had said that Prahlada's love was absolutely natural.[2]

1. A figure of speech meaning "one hundred percent" (sixteen annas make one rupee).
2. Ahetuki bhakti.

Section III

At Balaram's House with Narendra, Rakhal, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna enjoys devotional songs with Narendra and other devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is seated with the devotees in the room northeast of the parlour in Balaram's house. It is about one o'clock. Narendra, Bhavanath, Rakhal, Balaram, and M. are with him.

It is Saturday, 7 April 1883, twenty-fifth day of Chaitra, and Amavasya, the day of the new moon. Thakur arrived at Balaram's house in the morning and had his midday meal there. Narendra, Bhavanath, Rakhal, and a few other devotees had also been invited and dined with him. Thakur often says to Balaram, "Feed them. It will bring you the same merit as feeding a number of holy men."

Some days ago Thakur had gone to Keshab's house to see the play *Nava Vrindavan*. Narendra and Rakhal had accompanied him. Narendra had also acted in the performance, and Keshab had played the role of Pavhari Baba.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra and other devotees*): "Keshab was acting the part of a sadhu and sprinkling the water of peace – something that I did not like. Sprinkling the water of peace after a theatrical performance!

"Another person (Ku Babu) played the part of Sin. It's not right to play such a role. One should not commit sin; one should not even feign it."

Narendra is not feeling well, but Thakur wishes very much to hear him sing. He says, "Narendra, everybody is asking for you to sing."

Narendra sings to the accompaniment of the tanpura.

Sing, O bird, nesting in the depth of my heart.

Sing, O bird, who are perched on Brahman's wish-fulfilling tree.

Sing of the glories of All-pervading God.[1]

Eat the ripe fruits of righteousness, wealth, fulfillment, and liberation.[2]

Sing the name of Atmaram,[3] the delight of life. Repeat His name.

Sing, O bird of life, forever in my heart.

Call on Him like the thirsty chatak bird. Sing and be not idle!

He sings another song:

O Brahman, joy of the universe, the light supreme,

God without beginning, Lord of the universe, Soul of the soul.

He sings again:

O King of kings, reveal Yourself to me.

At Your feet I dedicate my soul and my life,

Seared by the fire of this world,

1. Vibhu.
2. Dharma, artha, kama, and moksha.
3. The Divine Self.

And a heart stained with wrongful acts.

O compassionate Lord, entangled in maya, I live as one who is dead.

Revive me by Your life-giving glance.

He sings another song:

On the salver of the sky blaze two lamps, sun and moon.

And yet another:

In the firmament of wisdom, the moon of divine love rises full.[1]

Narendra now stops and, at Thakur's request, Bhavanath sings:

O Compassionate One, who but You is my friend?

Who else remains a friend in happiness and sorrow; who else can assuage the pain of my misdeeds?

This sea of the world is full of peril; who but You can take me safely across?

Whose grace but Yours can calm the raging storm of my passions?

Who but You pours out the water of peace to extinguish the burning torment of my soul?

And when all others have forsaken me, who but You embraces me in my dying hour?

Narendra (*smiling*): "This fellow (Bhavanath) has given up fish and betel-leaf."[2]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bhavanath, smiling*): "Well, why is that? What's wrong with fish and betel leaf? They're not harmful. Giving up 'lust and greed' is the real renunciation. Where is Rakhal?"

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1. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section I, Chapter II.
2. Unnecessary luxuries.

A devotee: "Sir, Rakhal is asleep."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "A person went to see a theatrical performance,[1] carrying a mat under his arm. Seeing that there was still a lot of time before the play was to begin, he spread the mat on the floor and went to sleep. He woke up to find that the play was over. (*General laughter*.) Taking the mat under his arm, he went back home." (*Laughter*.)

Ramdayal is very sick. He is lying in bed in another room. Thakur goes to the doorway and inquires about him.

Panchadashi – Vedanta scripture and Sri Ramakrishna – worldly man and discussion on scriptures

It is about four o'clock. Thakur is sitting in the parlour with Narendra, Rakhal, M., Bhavanath, and some other devotees. A number of Brahmo devotees are among them. Sri Ramakrishna talks with them.

A Brahmo devotee: "Sir, have you read the Panchadashi?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "At first one should hear books like that and reason them out. But later:

> Cherish the beloved Mother Shyama in your heart.
>
> O mind, may you and I alone behold Her, and let no one else intrude.[2]

"One should hear the scriptures in the early stages of spiritual practice. But after attaining God,

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1. Yatra, a religious play.
2.. For the complete song refer to Section IX, Chapter I.

there's no lack of spiritual knowledge. The Divine Mother provides it more and more.

"When learning to write, you have to spell out every word, but later you can write fluently.

"You have to be up and doing while melting gold. You have to hold the bellows in one hand, the fan in the other, and the pipe in your mouth till the gold is melted. When the gold is melted, you pour it in the mould and you can sit down in peace.

"Simply studying the scriptures is not much help. Living in the midst of 'lust and greed,' you can't understand the real significance of the scriptures. Attachment to the world keeps spiritual knowledge from you.

> Though I learned many poems and dramas with great delight,
>
> I have forgotten them all in my love for Krishna.[1] (*All laugh*.)

Thakur now talks about Keshab with the Brahmo devotees.

"Keshab has both yoga and bhoga – he performs spiritual practices but enjoys worldly pleasures as well. He lives as a householder, but his mind is turned towards God."

A devotee talks about a university convocation, saying, "I saw any number of people there. It was a forest of human beings!"

---

1. Ramakrishna is making a play on words. He refers to Krishna by the word *kala*, which means "black" or "deaf." That is why the devotees laugh.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Seeing big crowds, I'm inspired with the thought of God. Had I seen that gathering, I would have been overwhelmed with spiritual feeling."

Section IV

Sri Ramakrishna at the Nandan Bagan Brahmo Samaj with Rakhal, M., and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Sight of the shrine inspires Sri Ramakrishna – Sri Radha seized with the madness of ecstatic love

Sri Ramakrishna has arrived at the Brahmo Samaj temple in Nandan Bagan, accompanied by Rakhal, M., and a few other devotees. He is talking with the Brahmo devotees. It is about five o'clock.

Kashisvara Mitra's house is in Nandan Bagan. He was a retired sub-judge and a member of the Adi Brahmo Samaj who used to worship the Lord in a big hall on the second level of his house. Now and then he would invite devotees for a festival. After his death, his sons Srinath, Yajnanath, and others continued to hold celebrations on a few occasions in the same manner as their father had done. It is they who have earnestly invited Thakur here.

After arriving, Thakur at first sits in the drawing-room on the ground floor. Gradually, Brahmo devotees arrive and gather there. Rabindra (Tagore) and other members of the Tagore family are present. When asked to go to the worship hall, Thakur and the devotees go upstairs to the second level. Thakur takes his seat there. A dais has been set up on the eastern side of the hall and a piano placed in the southwest corner. Many chairs are placed in the north part of the room, to the west of a door leading to the women's quarters. The worship will begin in the evening. Bhairava Bandopadhayaya of the Adi Brahmo Samaj,

along with one or two devotees, will sit at the dais and perform the worship.

It is summer, 2 May 1883, Wednesday, the 10th day of the dark fortnight of the month of Chaitra. Many of the Brahmo devotees are strolling around the big courtyard below or on the verandah. Janaki Goshal and a few others come to the worship hall, wishing to sit near Sri Ramakrishna. They want to hear him talk about God. When Thakur enters the room, he bows before the altar and then takes a seat. He says to Rakhal, M., and others:

"Narendra once asked me, 'What good is there in bowing before the shrine of the Samaj?'

"At the sight of a shrine, I'm reminded of Him. I feel divine inspiration. God is present wherever people talk about Him. One feels the presence in all the holy places of pilgrimage. Such places remind one of God.

"A devotee went into an ecstatic mood at the sight of a babul tree. It reminded him that the same wood is used for making the handles of axes used in Lord Radhakanta's garden.

"Another devotee had such loving devotion for his guru that he became overwhelmed with divine emotion to see a resident from his guru's neighbourhood.

"Srimati (Radha) would become inspired with Krishna at the sight of a cloud or blue clothing[1] or a picture of Krishna. She was so filled with yearning for him that she would cry like a mad woman, 'Where are you, my Krishna?'"

1. Krishna's body was dark blue.

Goshal: "Madness isn't good."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do you mean? Is this like the madness born of worrying about worldly things that makes you unconscious? This state of madness comes after meditating on God. Haven't you heard of the madness of love for God[1] and the madness of knowledge?"[2]

The way: to love God and to turn around the six enemies[3]

A Brahmo devotee: "How can one find God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "By developing love for Him. You must think constantly that God alone is real and everything else is of a fleeting nature.

"The Ashwattha tree alone is permanent. Its fruit lasts but a few days."

The Brahmo devotee: "Lust and anger are the real enemies. What can we do about them?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Turn the six enemies around – towards God.

"Have *lust* for union with the Atman.

"Show *anger* to those who are an obstacle in the way to God. Have *greed* to attain Him. If you have to say, 'Me and mine,' say it in relation to Him – as, for example, 'My Krishna or my Rama.' If you have *pride*, let it be like the pride of Bibhishana who said, 'I have bowed to Rama. This head shall never bow to anybody else.'"

1. Premonmada.
2. Jnanonmada.
3. Lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride, and envy.

The Brahmo devotee: "If everything is really being done by Him, you're not responsible for your sins."

Free will – responsibility

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Duryodhana said: 'O Hrishikesh,[1] I act as You, seated within my heart, make me act.'

"If you have the right kind of faith – that God alone is the Doer and you do nothing, you can't commit a sin. The person who knows how to dance well never takes a wrong step.

"But unless you're pure in heart, you don't even have the faith that God exists."

Thakur glances at the people gathered in the worship hall and says, "It's very good to gather like this now and then to meditate on God and sing His name and glories.

"But the love[2] of worldly people for God is momentary, drying up like drops of water falling on a hot iron. They don't last long."

Worship of the Brahmos and Sri Ramakrishna

The worship is about to begin. The large worship hall is full of Brahmo devotees. Several of the Brahmo women take their seats on chairs to the north of the room, holding music books in their hands.

They sing Brahmo songs to the accompaniment of piano and harmonium. There is no end to

1. An epithet of Krishna.
2. Anuraga.

Thakur's joy to hear the music, which is followed by an invocation, a prayer, and then the worship. The acharyas[1] sitting on the platform recite mantras from the Vedas.

You are our Father, grant us right understanding. We bow to You. Pray do not destroy us.

The Brahmo devotees chant in unison with an acharya:

Om! Brahman is infinite truth and knowledge.

Immortal and blissful, it glitters.

Brahman is peace, all-good, and one without a second.

It is pure, untouched by sin.

Now the acharyas sing a hymn of praise:

Om! We bow to the real, the cause of the universe.

We bow to pure consciousness, the refuge and support of all.

The religious teachers now pray, reciting another prayer:

Lead us from the unreal to the Real and from darkness to Light,

Lead us from death to immortality and reach us through and through.

O Rudra, protect us always with Your compassionate face.

Thakur becomes absorbed in ecstasy when he hears these hymns. Now an acharya reads a paper.

1. Religious teachers.

Sri Ramakrishna, without anger and full of supreme bliss – ocean of motiveless grace

The worship is over. Preparations are underway to serve luchis and sweets to the devotees. Most of the Brahmo devotees are enjoying fresh air in the courtyard below and on the verandah.

It is 9 p.m. Thakur has to return to the Dakshineswar Temple. The hosts are so busy attending to their invited guests that they completely forget to take care of him and his party.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Rakhal and others*): "Why, no one is paying any attention to us!"

Rakhal *(angrily*): "Sir, let us leave this place and return to Dakshineswar."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Oh, angry man! Who will pay the carriage fare of three rupees and two annas? Such stubbornness won't get you anywhere. You have no money and you're simply getting angry! Besides, where shall I eat so late at night?"

After quite some time, they hear that the leaf plates have been laid. All the devotees are asked to sit at the same time. Thakur, Rakhal, and others join the crowd and return to the second storey to eat. They find no place to sit in such a crowd. With great difficulty they find a place in a corner for Thakur to sit.

The spot is not clean. A brahmin woman cook serves vegetable curry. Thakur doesn't feel like eating it. He eats luchi with a pinch of salt and some sweets.

Thakur is an ocean of compassion. The hosts are young. How could he be annoyed with them for not showing him the proper respect? If he had left without eating anything, it would have been unlucky for them. Besides, they had arranged the feast in the name of God.

After eating, Thakur gets into a carriage. Who will pay the fare? The hosts are nowhere to be found. Later Thakur relates this incident of the carriage fare to the devotees with humor: "Someone went to the hosts to ask for the carriage fare. At first he was ignored. But finally, with great difficulty, they scraped up three rupees. He was not given the two annas! The hosts said, 'This should certainly be enough.'"

Section V

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple with Rakhal, Ram, Kedar, Tarak, M., and other Devotees

Chapter I

At Dakshineswar Temple – worship of Thakur's holy feet

After the evening worship in the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna stands before the image of the Divine Mother. He fans her with a chamara[1] for some time.

It is summer, Friday, 8 June 1883, the third day of the bright fortnight of the month of Jaishtha. (Some incidents that happened on the new moon day[2] were recorded in Volume II, Section V of the *Kathamrita*.) After dusk Ram, Kedar (Chatterji), and Tarak arrived from Calcutta in a carriage. They have brought flowers and sweets for Thakur.

Kedar must be about fifty years old. He is a great devotee. As soon as there is talk of God, his eyes are filled with tears. He used to visit the Brahmo Samaj and then the Kartabhaja and several other new religious sects. At last he has taken refuge at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. He holds a government accountant's job. His home is in the village of Halishar near Kanchdapara.

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1. Fan made from the tail of a yak, used in Hindu ritual worship.
2. Amavasya.

Tarak[1] is about twenty-four years old. He had married but his wife died after only a few days. His home is in the village of Barasat. His father is a spiritual aspirant of a high order and has visited Sri Ramakrishna a number of times. After the death of Tarak's mother, his father married a second time.

Tarak frequently visits Ram at his house. He often comes to visit Thakur with Ram and Nityagopal. He works in an office these days but his attitude is always one of indifference to worldly things.

Sri Ramakrishna comes out of the Kali Temple and lies prostrate on the platform in salutation to the Mother.

He sees Ram, M., Kedar, Tarak, and the other devotees standing there.

Affection for Tarak – Kedar and 'lust and greed'

He touches Tarak's chin affectionately. Indeed, he is very happy to see him.

Thakur sits on the floor of his room in an ecstatic mood. He stretches his legs out before him. Ram and Kedar decorate his feet with various kinds of flowers and garlands. Thakur is in samadhi.

Kedar has the attitude of a new devotee. He holds the big toe of Sri Ramakrishna, believing that by doing so, he will receive power from Thakur. Returning somewhat to the normal state, Thakur says, "Mother, what can he do to me by holding my toe?" Kedar humbly folds his hands.

1. Later Swami Shivananda.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Kedar, in the state of ecstasy*): "Your mind is attracted to 'lust and greed.' What use is it just to say that your mind does not dwell in them?

"Go forward. There is more after the sandalwood forest. A silver mine, a goldmine, and then diamonds and jewels. You've attained a little divine inspiration – don't think you've achieved everything."

Thakur again begins to talk to the Divine Mother, "Mother, please take him away."

Kedar says to Ram, his throat dry with fear, "What is Thakur saying!"

God-incarnate and his intimate disciples

Seeing Rakhal, Thakur is again absorbed in ecstasy and addresses him: "I have been here many days! When did you come?"

Is Thakur hinting that he is an incarnation of God and Rakhal is his intimate disciple, a companion of his inner circle?

Section VI

Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal, Ram, M., Bhavanath, and Other Devotees at the Panihati Festival

Chapter I

Thakur in the joy of devotional songs – is he Gauranga?

Sri Ramakrishna is dancing amidst a kirtan group on the crowded main road during the festival at Panihati. It is about one o'clock, Monday, 18 June 1883, the thirteenth day of the bright fortnight of the lunar month of Jaishtha.

People stand around Sri Ramakrishna in rows to watch him during devotional singing. He dances intoxicated with divine love. Some people wonder whether Gauranga has again incarnated himself. The sound of the Lord's name swells from all sides like ocean waves. Flowers are raining from all directions, and it appears as if 'Hari is being looted.'[1]

Navadvip Goswami was proceeding toward the Raghava temple singing the Lord's name all the way. Suddenly Thakur shot into the kirtan group with the speed of an arrow and began to dance.

It is the 'Festival of Flattened Rice'[2] of Pundit Raghava. It is celebrated every year on the thirteenth day of the lunar month in the bright fortnight. This festival was first celebrated by Raghunath Das. Thereafter, Raghava Pundit celebrated it every year. Nityananda said to Raghunath Das, "Oh, you thief!

1. A Bengali expression meaning to scatter before a crowd something to be picked up.
2. Chinra Festival.

You just come running from your home and steal the taste of divine love without any of us knowing it. I am going to punish you today. Celebrate a festival of flattened rice and serve the devotees."

Thakur visits the event almost every year. Today he came with Ram and other devotees. Ram had gone from Calcutta to Dakshineswar with M. in the morning. They had met Thakur, saluted him, and then taken their prasad meal on the northern verandah. Thakur went to Panihati by the same carriage in which Ram had come from Calcutta. Rakhal, M., Ram, Bhavanath, and one or two other devotees were also in the carriage. One of them sat on top.

The carriage traveled along the Magazine Road before coming to the Chanke Main Road (trunk road). On the way Thakur cuts many jokes with the young devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna in mahabhava[1] at the Panihati festival

As soon as the carriage reaches the venue of the Panihati festival, Ram and the other devotees are amazed to see Thakur, who had been in such a joyous state in the carriage, suddenly get down and shoot forth like an arrow. After looking for him for a long time, they found him dancing among the kirtan group of Navadvip Goswami and going into samadhi every now and then. Navadvip Goswami carefully supported him when he was in samadhi so that he would not fall down. Devotees on all sides were shouting the name of Hari and throwing flowers and sweet confections[2] at his feet. They were pushing each other to have a view of him.

1. The highest manifestation of divine love.
2. Batasas.

Thakur dances in a semiconscious state. Returning to full consciousness, he sings:

> Behold, the brothers have come! The two who shed tears while chanting Hari's name.
>
> They, who weeping, make others weep; they, who in ecstasy dancing, make the world dance;
>
> They, who receiving the world's blows, offer Hari's love.
>
> They are Kanai and Balai of Vraja, who would steal butter from the gopis' pots;
>
> Who, indifferent to caste, embrace the lowest of the lowly;
>
> Who, themselves inebriated, inebriate others;
>
> Who chant Hari's name, though they are none other than Hari Himself.
>
> They, who redeemed Jagai and Madhai and distinguish not friend from foe,
>
> These two brothers, Gaur and Nitai, have come to redeem humanity.

Everyone dances with Thakur, intoxicated with divine love and feeling that Gaur and Nitai are dancing in their presence. Thakur sings again:

> Behold, the whole of Nadia trembles under the waves of Gauranga's love!

The wave of devotees singing the kirtan advances toward the Raghava Temple. Dancing all the way and having circumambulated the temple, they bow to the images of Radha-Krishna. Now the wave of people moves toward the temple of Radha-Krishna which was established by the babus of Gangakul.

Some of the singing party enter the temple of Radhakanta, but the majority are unable to enter.

They push each other aside, trying to peep inside the doorway.

Dancing in the Radha-Krishna temple courtyard

Thakur dances again in the courtyard of Radha-Krishna. He is fully intoxicated with the joy of the kirtan. He goes into samadhi every now and then, flowers and sweets falling at his feet from all sides. Time and again the name of Hari is raised in the courtyard. The same sound, reaching the main road, is echoed by a thousand voices. Passengers on the boats sailing the Ganges[1] listen wonderstruck to the chanting, like ocean waves, of Hari's name. They themselves begin to chant, "Haribol, Haribol."

Thousands of men and women assembled at the festival think to themselves that Sri Gauranga himself must assuredly have manifested in this great saint. One or two feel that he is none other than Gauranga.

Several people have assembled in the small courtyard. The devotees bring Sri Ramakrishna out of the courtyard very carefully.

Sri Ramakrishna in Mani Sen's drawing room

Thakur comes with the devotees to Mani Sen's drawing room and takes a seat. The same Sen family is in charge of serving Sri Radha and Krishna in the temple at Panihati. It is also this family who arranges the great festival every year and who invites Thakur.

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1. Bhagirathi.

After Thakur has rested for a while, Mani Sen and his spiritual preceptor, Navadvip Goswami, take him to another room where he is served prasad. A little while later Ram, Rakhal, M., Bhavanath, and other devotees are taken to a room where they take their seats. The gracious loving Lord of the devotees, Sri Ramakrishna, stands up, full of joy, and feeds devotees.

Chapter II

Instructions to Navadvip Goswami

Mahabhava and ecstatic love of Gauranga, his three states of consciousness

It is afternoon. Thakur is seated in Mani Sen's drawing room with Rakhal, Ram, and other devotees. After prasad and feeling refreshed, Navadvip Goswami enters the drawing room and sits beside Thakur.

Mani Sen offers to pay Thakur's carriage fare. Thakur, who is sitting on a couch in the drawing room, says, "Why would these people (Ram and other devotees) accept the carriage fare from you? They earn money."

He then talks with Navadvip Goswami about God.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Navadvip*): "When love and devotion for God matures, one experiences ecstasy.[1] It is followed by mahabhava. After mahabhava

1. Bhava.

comes ecstatic love[1] and then the attainment of the goal (God-realization).

"Gauranga would experience mahabhava and ecstatic love for God.

"When one feels ecstatic love, one not only forgets the world but one's own body which is so dear. Gauranga experienced this ecstatic love. Seeing the ocean and thinking it was the Jamuna, he jumped in.

"An ordinary person does not experience either mahabhava or ecstatic love – he goes only as far as ecstasy.[2] Gauranga used to experience all three states of consciousness. Am I right?"

Navadvip: "Yes, sir. The inmost state, the state of semi-consciousness, and the conscious state."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He would remain in samadhi during the inmost state. In the state of semi-consciousness, he could only dance, and in the outward conscious state he would sing the name and glories of God."

Navadvip brings his son and introduces him to Thakur. His son is a young man and studies scriptures. He salutes Thakur.

Navadvip: "He studies holy books at home. It used to be very difficult to get a copy of the Vedas in this country. Max Müller translated them and printed them. That's how people are able to read them now."

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1. Prema.
2. Bhava.

Scholarship and scriptures – try to understand the essence

Sri Ramakrishna: "Too much study of the scriptures brings more harm than good.

"You should know the essence of them. After that the holy book is not needed.

"Having understood the essence, you should dive deep to attain God.

"The Divine Mother has told me that the essence of the Vedanta is that Brahman is the reality and the world an illusion. The essence of the *Gita* is what you get after pronouncing the word *Gita* ten times – in other words, *tyagi*, *tyagi* [a man of renunciation]."

Navadvip: "It doesn't exactly become *tyagi,* it becomes *tagi*. But both words convey the same meaning. From the root *tag* you have *taga,* and adding the suffix *i*, it becomes *tagi*. Both *tyagi* and *tagi* have the same meaning."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The essence of the Gita is: O man, renounce everything and practice spiritual disciplines to realize God."

Navadvip: "But how can we make our minds willing to renounce?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You who are goswamis serve the deity. You can't afford to renounce family life. If you do, who will carry out the worship and service of the deity? You must renounce mentally.

"God Himself has kept you in the household to set an example for mankind. Resolve a thousand times and still you will not be able to renounce

family life. He has given you such a nature that you are bound to carry out the affairs of the world.

"Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, 'What do you mean, you will not fight? Even if you wish otherwise, you will not be able to desist from fighting this war. Your very nature will compel you to fight.'"

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi – yoga and bhoga of Goswami

When Thakur says, "Sri Krishna said to Arjuna," he passes into samadhi. His body immediately becomes perfectly still; he does not even blink. It is not possible to perceive if he is breathing or not. Navadvip Goswami, his son, and the devotees watch him, speechless with wonder.

Returning somewhat to normal, Thakur says to Navadvip: "Yoga and bhoga! You belong to the line of goswamis who strive for union with God and at the same time enjoy worldly pleasures.

"Now pray to God – pray sincerely – only this prayer: 'O Lord, I don't want the glories of Your world-bewitching maya, I want You alone!'

"He is present in all elements and beings, no doubt. But do you know who a real devotee is? He who dwells in Him; he whose mind, heart, and soul have been merged in Him."

Thakur has now returned completely to the normal state of consciousness. He says to Navadvip: "Some people say that the state (of samadhi) I pass into is a disease. But I ask, can one be unconscious while contemplating Him whose Consciousness has made the whole world conscious?"

Mani Sen says goodbye to the visiting brahmins and Vaishnava devotees. He offers to each of them a rupee or two, according to his status. He offers five rupees to Thakur, but Sri Ramakrishna says: "I cannot accept money."

Mani Sen insists.

Thakur then says, "In the name of your guru, please do not offer me anything!" Mani Sen still offers the money. Thakur anxiously asks M., "Must I accept it?" M. objects severely, saying, "Certainly not. By no means."

Mani Sen's people give the money to Rakhal on the pretext of buying mangoes and sandesh.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "I have refused the money in his guru's name. I am free now. Rakhal has accepted it. It is now his responsibility."

Sri Ramakrishna boards the carriage with the devotees to return to the Dakshineswar temple.

Meditation on formless God and Sri Ramakrishna

Mati Seal's shrine is on the way. Several times Thakur had said to M., "We will go together to see Mati Seal's lake and I can teach you how to meditate on the formless God."

Thakur has a bad cold. Even so, he goes inside the shrine with the devotee. In this shrine Gauranga is worshiped.

It is a little before dusk. Thakur and the devotees salute the image of Sri Gauranga by lying prostrate on the ground.

Now they go to the lake in the eastern part of the temple garden and enjoy the view of the lake and the fish. People do not harm the fish here. As soon as they throw puffed rice and other food to the fish, a swarm of big ones comes to eat it. Then, free from all fear, they swim and play in the water joyfully.

Thakur says to M., "Look at these fish swimming joyfully in the ocean of Blissful Consciousness.[1] Be like these fish."

1. Chidananda.

Section VII

Sri Ramakrishna as Guru at Dakshineswar with Intimate Disciples

Chapter I

Listening to the life of Prahlada puts Thakur into ecstasy – he condemns cohabiting with one's wife

Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the floor in his room at Dakshineswar, listening to Ramlal reading the life of Prahlada from the Bhaktamala. It is about eight o'clock.

It is Saturday, 15 December 1883, the first day of the dark fortnight of Agrahayana. Mani is on retreat with Thakur in Dakshineswar. Seated near Thakur, he is listening to the narration of the life of Prahlada. Rakhal, Latu, and Harish are in the room. Some devotees are seated, while others are moving about. Hazra is on the verandah.

Thakur goes into ecstasy while he listens to Prahlada's life. When Hiranyaksha was killed by Narasimha,[1] Brahma and the other gods saw his frightful aspect and heard his mighty roar. Fearing that such anger might lead to the dissolution of the world,[2] they sent Prahlada to him. Like a child, Prahlada chanted a hymn of praise to the deity who, filled with love for devotees, licked Prahlada's body affectionately. With deep emotion, Thakur exclaims, "Ah, ah! What love for the devotee!" As he

1. Vishnu in His incarnation as man-lion.
2. Pralaya.

says this, he goes into bhava samadhi. His body is motionless, and tears of intense love fall from the corners of his eyes.

When Sri Ramakrishna's ecstasy is over, he goes to his smaller cot and sits there. Mani sits on the floor at his feet. Thakur talks with Mani, expressing his anger and disgust for those treading the path of God while at the same time cohabiting with their wives.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Are you not ashamed of yourself! You have children and you still cohabit with your wife. This is the conduct of an animal! Have you no aversion to saliva, blood, excreta, urine? Whoever contemplates the lotus feet of God sees even the most beautiful woman as ash from a cremation fire. To enjoy a body which will not last and which contains all kinds of impurities – worms, pus, phlegm and so on! Don't you feel ashamed of yourself?"

Thakur is intoxicated with love for God – worship of Mother Kali

M. sits still, hanging his head from the harsh rebuke. Sri Ramakrishna adds, "When a person gets even a drop of God's ecstatic love, 'lust and greed' become so insignificant! When you get a drink sweetened with sugar candy, how can you care for one mixed with molasses? When you pray to God with a yearning heart, when you chant His name and glories incessantly, you gradually develop that kind of love for Him."

Saying this, Thakur is intoxicated with ecstatic love and dances around in his room, singing:

Who is chanting the name of Hari on the bank of the Ganges?

Is it Nitai, the bestower of love, who has come?

Who but he can bring peace to the soul?

It is now about ten o'clock. Ramlal has ended the daily worship of Mother Kali in the temple. Thakur goes to the temple, accompanied by Mani. Entering the shrine, Thakur sits on the worshiper's seat. He offers a flower or two at the feet of the Mother, and placing a flower on his head, he meditates. Then he sings a hymn of praise to the Divine Mother:

I have heard, O Consort of Shiva, Your fear-dispelling name and have laid on You my burden. Save me as You will.[1]

Returning from the temple, Thakur sits on the southeast verandah of his room. It is about ten o'clock. The offering of food to the deities and their worship has not yet been performed. Thakur takes some butter and fruits which had been offered earlier to Mother Kali and Radhakanta. Rakhal and other devotees also have some.

Rakhal is sitting near Thakur. He is reading Smile's *Self Help*, about Lord Erskine.

Work without expectation of any reward – a man of knowledge reads no scriptures

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "What does he say?"

M.: "That Lord Erskine used to perform his duties without the expectation of any reward. The book is about selfless work."

1. For the complete song refer to Volume III, Section IV, Chapter II.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Then it is very good. But the mark of a man of perfect knowledge is that he doesn't keep a single book with him. For instance, Sukadeva. All knowledge was on the tip of his tongue.

"Holy books, scriptures, contain sand mixed with sugar. A holy man takes only the sugar, leaving the sand. A holy man takes only the essence."

Is Thakur alluding to his own state by referring to Sukadeva to make the devotees understand?

Vaishnavcharan, the singer, arrives and sings the kirtan, "Subol Milan."

After a while Ramlal brings prasad for Thakur on a tray. After eating it, Thakur rests for some time.

M. spends the night in the nahabat. Whenever the Holy Mother came to Dakshineswar to serve Sri Ramakrishna, she would stay there. For many months now she has been living in Kamarpukur.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal, Latu, Mukherji of Janai, and other devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the western circular verandah with Mani. In front of them the Ganges is flowing southward. Close by are flowering oleander, bela, jasmine, rose, and poinciana. It is about ten o'clock.

It is Sunday, 16 December 1883, the second day of the dark fortnight of Agrahayana.

Thakur sings as he gazes at Mani:

O Mother Tara! You will have to take me across for I have taken refuge in You.

I am like a bird in a cage.

I have committed wrongdoings beyond number.

I am bereft of spiritual knowledge, and like a cow that has lost its calf,

I wander to and fro, drowning in maya's spell.

Earnest longing like Sita's – thoughts on Rama

"But why? Why should I be like a bird in a cage? For shame!"

While talking, Thakur goes into ecstasy, his body and mind still, his eyes shedding tears. After some time, he prays, "Mother! Make me like Sita. Grant that I may absolutely forget everything – body, organ of generation, hands, feet, and breasts – may I not be aware of any of these. My only thought should be: Where is Rama?"

Is Thakur inspired with Sita to make Mani realize how much yearning is needed to attain God? Sita was mad for Rama. She lived for him and centered all her thoughts on him. She had forgotten and was oblivious of the body, which is so dear to everyone.

It is four o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna is again sitting in the room with the devotees. Mukherji of Janai has come. He belongs to the same gotra (sub-caste) as that of Prankrishna. With him is a Brahmo friend well versed in the scriptures. Mani, Rakhal, Latu, Harish, Jogin, and other devotees are also present.

Jogin[1] is a member of the Savaran Choudhury family of Dakshineswar. Almost every afternoon he comes to visit Thakur and goes home at night. Jogin has not yet married.

Mukherji (*after saluting Sri Ramakrishna*): "It is a great joy to meet you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "God is present within everyone; all have the same gold within. It is only that with some there is a greater manifestation; in the worldly-minded the gold lies buried under so much dirt."

Mukherji (*laughing*): "Sir, what is the difference between worldly and otherworldly?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "While practicing spiritual disciplines, one must renounce, saying to oneself, 'Not this. Not this.' After attaining God, one realizes that God Himself has become everything.

"When Ramachandra felt dispassion for the world, Dasharatha approached Rishi Vasishtha Deva in great anxiety and asked for his help in dissuading Rama from renouncing family life. Rishi Vasishtha went to Ramachandra and found him in a sad mood, feeling deep dispassion for the world. Vasishtha said, 'Rama, why do you want to renounce worldly life? Is the world outside God? Let's discuss this.' Rama then saw that the world was also made of the same Supreme Brahman. So he kept quiet.

"Butter comes out of the same substance that makes buttermilk. It belongs to the substance to which buttermilk belongs, as buttermilk belongs to

1. Later Swami Yogananda.

the substance to which butter belongs. When you have churned buttermilk assiduously to take out the butter (that is, attained Brahmajnana), you see that both butter and buttermilk exist together – where there is butter, there is also buttermilk. As long as one feels that Brahman exists, then living beings, the world, and the twenty-four cosmic principles also exist."

How to attain knowledge of Brahman

"One cannot tell what Brahman is from words. Everything has become polluted through human speech. No one has been able to say what Brahman is. Thus It has not been polluted. I said this to Vidyasagar. He was very pleased to hear it.

"The knowledge of Brahman cannot be attained when there is the least trace of worldliness. It is only possible when the mind is completely rid of 'lust and greed.' Parvati said to Giriraj, 'Father, if you want the knowledge of Brahman, seek the company of holy men.'"

Is Thakur saying that the knowledge of Brahman is not possible if a worldly person or a sannyasin lives amidst 'lust and greed'?

Fall from yoga – living in the world after attaining knowledge of Brahman

Sri Ramakrishna, addressing Mukherji, continues: "You have wealth and riches. Even then you call on God. This is very good. The Gita says that the one who falls from yoga is reborn as a devotee in a rich family."

Mukherji (*laughing, to his friend*): "One fallen from yoga is reborn in the house of the prosperous."[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "If God wills, He can keep a man of spiritual knowledge in the world. The world and all living beings have come into existence at His will. His will prevails."

Mukherji (*laughing*): "Why does He will? Does He lack anything?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "What's the harm in it? Water remains water whether it is still or in waves."

Are the world and its living beings illusory?

"It is the same snake, whether it is coiled up and motionless or slithering along in an undulating manner.

"A gentleman remains the same individual whether he is working or sitting still.

"How can you leave out the world and the living beings? If you do that, it loses its full weight. A bel fruit weighs much less when its skin is peeled off and its seeds taken out.

"Brahman is free from attachment to anything. Air carries both good and bad smells, but it remains unaffected. Brahman and His Power are not separate from each other. The world and its creatures have been created by the same Primal Power."

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1. Bhagavad Gita 6:41.

The way to attain samadhi: weep for God – path of love and path of meditation

Mukherji: "Why does one fall from yoga?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "There is a saying, 'When I was in my mother's womb, I was in union with God. Coming into the world, I have eaten its dirt. The midwife has cut the umbilical cord, but how am I to cut the cord of maya?

"'Lust and greed' is maya. One attains union with God when the mind is rid of these two. The Atman, the Supreme Soul, is the magnet. The embodied soul is like a needle. When the former pulls the latter, it results in union. But if the needle is covered with dirt, the magnet can't pull it. When, however, the dirt is removed, it is drawn again. You have to clean yourself of the dirt of 'lust and greed.'"

Mukherji: "How can we do this?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Weep for God with a longing heart. The water of your tears will wash off the dirt. And then the magnet can pull it. Only then will you attain union with God."

Mukherji: "Oh, wonderful!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "When you can weep for God, He grants His vision. And you attain samadhi. Perfection in yoga is samadhi. When you weep, suspension of breath[1] occurs by itself. Samadhi comes after that.

"And then there is the practice of meditation. Shiva manifests especially in the Sahasrara.

1. Kumbhaka.

Meditate on Him. The body is like a saucer, and the mind and intellect are like water. In this water, the sun of Sat-chit-ananda is reflected. By meditating on that reflected sun, one has the revelation of the real sun through God's grace."

Associate with holy men and give the power of attorney to God

"People living in the world need the constant company of the holy. It is necessary for everyone. Even a sannyasin must associate with holy men. But with householders the disease is chronic. They have to live amidst 'lust and greed' all the time."

Mukherji: "Yes, sir. Their disease is chronic."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Give your power of attorney to God. Let Him do what He likes. You just cry to Him longingly, like a kitten. Wherever a mother cat places her kitten is all right. Sometimes she places it on a bed, sometimes she takes it to the kitchen."

A beginner studies the scriptures – spiritual practice leads to realization of God

Mukherji: "It is good to read the Gita and such holy books."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How will it help to just read, or listen to holy books? Someone may have heard of milk, someone else have seen it, another may have drunk it. You can have the vision of God, you can even talk to Him.

"The first stage is that of a beginner. He studies and listens to the reading of scriptures. The next is that of the aspirant who calls on God, who meditates and thinks about Him and sings His

Name and glories. Next, one becomes perfected[1] and knows God intuitively.[2] In the last stage one attains God's vision and becomes the most perfect of the perfected.[3] This was the state of Chaitanya Deva. He was at times in the attitude of a mother toward her child[4] and at other times that of a beloved."[5]

In amazement Mani, Rakhal, Jogin, Latu, and other devotees listen to this talk on the highest truth, rarely heard even by gods.

Now Mukherji and his friends take their leave. They salute and then stand up. Thakur also stands up out of respect for them.

Mukherji (*smiling*): "Why should you have to stand up or sit?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What is the harm? Water is water whether it is still or moving. A leaf plate thrown away is carried wherever a wind storm carries it. I am the instrument, God is the operator."

1. Siddha.
2. Bodhebodha.
3. Siddha of siddhas.
4. Vatsalya.
5. Madhura.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna's realization and the inner meaning of Vedanta – non-dualism and qualified non-dualism[1] – is the world an illusion? – identity of the Undifferentiated and the differentiated

Mukherji from Janai has left. Mani is reflecting that according to the philosophy of Vedanta everything is like a dream. Would it be true, then, that the embodied soul, the world, and oneself are illusory?

Mani has studied the Vedanta, and he has also read a little Hegel and other German scholars which are an indistinct echo of Vedanta. But Sri Ramakrishna does not reason like feeble human beings. The Mother of the Universe has revealed[2] everything to him. Mani thinks about this.

A little later Sri Ramakrishna talks to him alone on the western circular verandah. Before them the Ganges is flowing south with a gurgling sound. It is cold. The sun is still visible in the southeastern sky. He whose life is full of the Veda, whose words are the Vedas, he through whom God speaks, whose sweet words inspire the hearer to internalize the true import of the Veda, the Vedanta and the Bhagavata, this very person, an ocean of motiveless grace, is speaking as guru.

Mani: "Is the world illusory?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why should it be an illusion? What you are talking about is only a matter of philosophical reasoning.

"In the very beginning when a person discriminates 'Not this, not this,' it is perceived that Brahman is not living beings, or the world, or the

1. Advaitavada and Vishishtadvaitavada.
2. Through transcendental perception, God-vision.

twenty-four cosmic principles – that all these are like a dream. Then comes reversal.[1] That is, one has gone up to the Absolute and now comes down to the phenomenal universe. Then the perception is that God Himself has become the universe and all living beings.

"You climb to the roof by the stairs. As long as you are conscious of the roof, you are aware of the stairs. The person who is aware of the high is also aware of the low.

"But after you have climbed to the roof, you see that the material of which the roof is made – bricks, lime, and brickdust – has also been used for making the stairs.

"It is like the bel fruit illustration that I have given.

"He to whom the Absolute (the Unchangeable) belongs is the same as He to whom the phenomenal (the ever-changing) universe belongs.

"'I-ness' simply does not go away. As long as there is the awareness that 'I am a pot (the body),' there are the individual soul and the universe. When one attains God, one realizes that God

1. Consciousness has an eternal pulsation, outward and inward. Evolution is the outward movement of Consciousness, resulting in the manifestation of the universe; involution is the reversal or inward movement of Consciousness in which all names and forms dissolve back into the unity of the Absolute. M. says in his *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Part I: "You go backwards to the Supreme Being and your personality becomes lost in His personality. You then retrace your steps. You get back your ego (personality) and come back to the point where you started, only to see that the world and your ego or self were involved in the same Supreme Being."

Himself has become the living beings and the universe. Just reasoning about this is of no help at all.

"Shiva has both states of mind. When immersed in samadhi, in mahayoga, he is absorbed in the joy of the Self.[1] When he comes down from this state, he retains a little 'I-ness.' Then he dances, chanting, 'Rama, Rama.'"

Is Thakur alluding to his own state by describing the state of Shiva?

It is dusk. Thakur chants the names of the Mother of the Universe and meditates on Her. The devotees also go to solitary places to meditate on their ideals. Vesper services begin and arati is performed in Mother Kali's Temple, in Sri Radhakanta's temple, and in the twelve temples of Shiva.

Today is the second day of the dark fortnight. The moon appears at nightfall. Under its light, the temple spires, the surrounding trees and creepers, and the Ganges to the west of the temple gain a wonderous beauty. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room. Mani is sitting on the floor. Thakur again discusses the question which Mani had raised earlier.

Visions of Consciousness everywhere – the treasurer writes a letter to Mathur

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Why should the world be an illusion? These words are only a matter of reasoning. After realizing God, you realize that He Himself has become the universe and its living beings.

1. Atmarama.

"The Divine Mother showed me in the Kali Temple that it is She who has become everything. She showed me that everything is filled with divine consciousness – the image, the altar, the water vessels,[1] the door frame, the marble floor – all was divine consciousness.

"Whatever I saw in the room was filled with the essence[2] – the essence of Sat-chit-ananda.

"I saw a wicked man in front of the Kali Temple. But even within him I saw the splendour of Her Power.

"That is why I fed a cat luchis[3] that was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I saw that She had become everything – even the cat. The treasurer wrote a letter to Mathur Babu to tell him that the priest[4] was feeding a cat with the food to be offered to the deity. Mathur Babu knew the state I was in. He replied, 'Let him do what he likes. Say nothing to him.'

"When you have attained God, you see correctly that He Himself has become the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles.

"But what happens when God completely wipes out 'I-consciousness' cannot be described in words. As Ramprasad says in one of his songs, "Only You know whether You are good or I am good." I sometimes get in this state too.

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1. Kosha and kushi.
2. Rasa.
3. Fried bread.
4. Bhattacharya.

"When you reason, you see it one way. But when God reveals it to you, you see it in quite a different way."

Chapter IV

The goal of life is God-realization – the way is intense love

The next day is Monday; it is eight o'clock. Thakur is seated in his room. Rakhal, Latu, and other devotees are also there. Doctor Madhu has arrived. He is sitting close to Thakur on his small cot. Doctor Madhu is a wise old man. He often comes to see Thakur when he is not feeling well. He is a very witty man.

Mani enters the room, salutes, and takes his seat.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Love of Sat-chit-ananda is the main thing."

Thakur's vision of Sita – Gauri Pundit's comments

"What is the intensity of this love? How can you develop love for God? Gauri used to say, 'To understand Rama, you have to be like Sita. To understand Bhagavan, you have to be like Bhagavati (the Divine Mother). You will have to practice austerities – hard austerities – the way Bhagavati did for Shiva. To know Purusha (the Supreme Lord), you have to assume the attitude of Prakriti – the attitude of a friend, of a handmaid, or of a mother.'

"I had a vision of Sita. I saw that her whole mind was given to Rama. She was oblivious to anything else – body, hands, feet, clothes, jewelry,

and so on. Her entire life was filled with thoughts of Rama. Without Rama, without having him, she felt she could not survive."

Mani: "Yes, sir. Like a mad woman."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Lovelorn! Oh, you have to be mad for God to attain Him!

"This does not happen if the mind dwells on 'lust and greed.' What joy is there in intercourse with a woman? One feels ten million times that joy from a vision of God. Gauri used to say that in ecstatic love for God all the pores of the skin on the body become mahayoni, the great sexual organ. One feels the joy of union with the Atman in every pore."

The Guru must be a perfect jnani

Sri Ramakrishna: "You must call on God with great yearning. You can hear from the lips of the guru how God can be realized.

"But only when the guru himself is a perfect man of knowledge can he show the way.

"Desires disappear when you attain perfect knowledge. You become like a child five years old. Both Dattatreya and Jadabharata had the nature of a child."

Mani: "Yes, I know about them. But there have also been so many others."

Sri Ramakrishna: "A man of knowledge is freed from all desires. Whatever little desire remains can do him no harm. When a sword touches the philosopher's stone, it turns into gold. Then it can't kill anyone. In the same way, the desire and anger

of a man of knowledge are only superficial, they are just in name. They can do no harm."

Mani: "Sir, just as you say, a man of knowledge is beyond the three gunas. He is not under the control of any of them – sattva, rajas, or tamas. These three are robbers."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You must assimilate this truth."

Mani: "It seems there are not many people of perfect knowledge on earth, perhaps no more than three or four."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why do you say that? You see a number of sadhus and sannyasins in monasteries in western India."

Mani: "Sir, I can also become a sannyasin like one of them."

Hearing this, Sri Ramakrishna gazes fixedly at Mani for a few moments.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "By renouncing everything?"

Mani: "What can a person achieve without going beyond maya? If one is not able to subdue maya, what can mere sannyasa do?"

Everyone is silent for a few moments.

A devotee beyond the three gunas is like a child

Mani: "Sir, what is the love that is beyond the three gunas?"[1]

1. Trigunatita bhakti.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Having developed such devotion for God that a devotee sees everything permeated with divine consciousness: Krishna as consciousness, His abode as consciousness, the devotees as divine, everything permeated with consciousness. Only a very few devotees attain such love for God."

Doctor Madhu (*smiling*): "It is the love beyond the three gunas – that is, the devotee is not subject to any of the gunas."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Yes. Like a child five years old. He is not yet under the control of any guna."

After the midday meal, Sri Ramakrishna takes a little rest. Manilal Mallick comes in, salutes him, and takes his seat on the floor. Mani is also sitting on the floor. Lying on the cot, Thakur exchanges a few words with Mani Mallick every now and then.

Mani Mallick: "Did you go to see Keshab Sen?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. How is he now?"

Mani Mallick: "A little better."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I found him to be very rajasic. I had to wait a long time before I could see him."

Thakur now sits up on his bed and talks with the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna's life story in his own words – he is mad uttering, "Rama, Rama"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "I went mad repeating the name of Rama. I used to roam around

with Ramlala, the deity the sannyasin gave me. I'd give him a bath, feed him, and put him to bed. Wherever I had to go, I would take him along. I was mad, repeating, 'Ramlala, Ramlala.'"

Chapter V

Sri Ramakrishna at the foot of vilwa tree and under the panchavati

Sri Ramakrishna is talking with Mani near the vilwa tree. It is about nine o'clock.

It is Wednesday, 19 December 1883, the fifth day of the dark fortnight.

Under this same vilwa tree Thakur had practiced spiritual disciplines – a very solitary spot. To its north is the magazine and a wall. To the west willow trees rustle like a soul indifferent to the world. Nearby flows the Ganges. The panchavati can be seen to the south. There are so many trees and plants that the temples are barely visible.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "But nothing will help without renouncing 'lust and greed.'"

Mani: "But why? Rishi Vasishtha said to Ramachandra, 'Rama, you may renounce the world if the world is outside God.'"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling a little*): "That was because Ravana had to be killed. It was for this reason that Rama lived in the world and married."

Mani stands, like a log of wood, speechless.

After saying this, Sri Ramakrishna goes toward the panchavati to reach his room.

Spiritual disciplines for formless God are very difficult

Sri Ramakrishna is talking with Mani at the foot of the panchavati. It is about ten o'clock.

Mani: "Sir, isn't it possible to practice disciplines to attain the impersonal God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why is it not possible? But it is a very difficult path.[1] The rishis of olden days used to have the inner experience of God's existence[2] by practicing a great many austerities. They would feel the reality of Brahman. But how hard was their labour? They would leave their huts early in the morning, practice austerities throughout the day, and return only at dusk. Then they would have a small meal of fruits and roots.

"This kind of spiritual practice [on the formless] is not possible until one is completely rid of worldliness. The mind has to be completely free from the sense of form, taste, smell, touch, and sound. Only then is it purified. That pure mind is the same as the pure Atman. It must be absolutely free from 'lust and greed.'

"Then one has quite a different experience: 'God indeed is the doer, I am a non-doer.' One no longer thinks that without the 'I' one cannot carry on, whether in happiness or sorrow.

"A wicked fellow beat a sadhu of a monastery into unconsciousness. When he regained con-

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1. kleśo 'dhikataras teṣām avyaktāsaktacetasām ।
avyaktā hi gatir duḥkhaṁ dehavadbhir avāpyate ।। Bhagavad Gita 12:5
2. Bodhebodha.

sciousness, he was asked who was offering him milk. He replied, 'He who beat me is now feeding me.'"

Mani: "Yes, I know that story."

Steady[1] samadhi and sudden[2] samadhi

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, it is not enough to just know. You have to internalize what it means.

"Worldly thoughts prevent the mind from entering into samadhi.

"One becomes steady in samadhi when one is completely free of worldly thoughts. It is possible for me to quit the body in steady samadhi, but I still have a little desire to enjoy the love of God and the company of devotees. So I keep my mind a little on the body.

"And then there is sudden samadhi, when the scattered mind is gathered suddenly. You understand this, don't you?"

Mani: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "A scattered mind suddenly becomes withdrawn. This samadhi does not last long. Worldly thoughts intrude and end it. The yogi breaks from his union with God.

"In the village [Kamarpukur] a mongoose was living in a hole in the wall. As long as it was in the hole it felt comfortable. Someone tied a brick to its tail and it was forced to come out of its hole by the pull of the brick. Every time it tried to go back into

1. Sthita.
2. Unmana.

the hole for peace, it was pulled out by the pull of the brick. Worldly thoughts divert the mind of the yogi from meditation.

"A man of the world can sometimes experience samadhi. A lotus opens at sunrise. But as soon as the sun is covered by clouds, it closes its petals again. Worldly thoughts are the clouds."

Mani: "Can't one develop both spiritual knowledge and love for God through spiritual disciplines?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "They can both be acquired through love for God. You get both. When it is needed, God Himself grants the knowledge of Brahman. Having a high spiritual ideal, a single receptacle can hold both knowledge and love of God."

Section VIII

Sri Ramakrishna in the Role of Guru at the Dakshineswar Temple with Devotees

Chapter I

Thakur in samadhi – his vision of God and state of a paramahamsa

Sri Ramakrishna is seated with Rakhal, Latu, Mani, Harish, and other devotees on the southeastern verandah of his room. The time is about nine o'clock. It is Sunday, 23 December 1883, the ninth day of the dark fortnight of the lunar month of Agrahayana.

It is the tenth day of Mani's stay with the guru.

Manomohan has come from Konnagar this morning. He will meet with Thakur, rest for a while, and then go to Calcutta. Hazra is sitting close to Thakur. A Vaishnava from Nilkantha's region sings for him, beginning with a song of Nilkantha.

He sings:

Like Krishna's, the complexion of the handsome Sri Gauranga, the dancing lover of God, is of golden hue.

This time he has incarnated in Nadia in a different guise, hiding his old marks.

He has come to destroy the deep darkness of the Kaliyuga and to manifest the joy of intense love in its surpassing brilliance.

This time he has come with three desires[1] and three tastes.[2] He has descended for the sake of all these.

The world is intoxicated by the touch of these three, particularly the delightful nectar of intense love.

This time having exchanged the blue complexion of the incarnate Krishna with Radha's golden hue, you have come.

You have ascended into mahabhava, and sattvic and lesser bhavas have melted within you**.**

While you roam about wailing in the forest for a taste of that sublime mood, the tide of that intensely longing love floods your surroundings.

You, the new sannyasi seeking holy places, now go to Nilachal and then to Kashi.

You distribute the abundance of God's love without any distinction of caste.

Says Dwija Nilkantha, How my mind longs to know when my desire to sell[3] myself at Gaur's feet will be fulfilled.

The next song is about mental worship.[4]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hazra*): "This song about mental worship sounded a bit peculiar to me."

Hazra: "It is not for a spiritual aspirant – the lamp of knowledge, the image of knowledge!"

Totapuri weeps in the panchavati – Padmalochan weeps

Sri Ramakrishna: "The song felt a bit odd. "The songs of older times are more genuine. I once sang for Totapuri in the panchavati – 'O man, get ready

1. Vanccha, wishes, desires, or longings to be pursued.
2. Asvadan, tastes in the sense of those things that are sweet or desirable.
3. Surrender.
4. Manas puja

for battle! Death has entered your house in battle array.'

"And I sang another song – 'O Mother, it is no one else's fault. I drown in the waters of the well these very hands have dug.'

"The Naked One[1] – such a jnani – did not understand the meaning of the song. And yet it brought him to tears.

"What good things were said in these songs – 'O man, meditate on Vishnu.[2] Then you will be freed from even the fear of the extremely terrible King of Death.'[3]

"Padmalochan also wept to hear me sing a song of Ramprasad. And you know what a great pundit he was!"

God vision – one and many; unity in diversity – Sri Ramakrishna and the philosophy of qualified non-dualism[4]

After his midday meal, Thakur takes a little rest. Mani is sitting on the floor. Thakur greatly enjoys listening to the sanai[5] being played at the nahabat.

Later, Thakur explains to Mani that Brahman Himself has become all living beings and the phenomenal universe.

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1. An epithet of Totapuri.
2. Narkantkari Srikanta.
3. Yama.
4. Vishishtadvaitavada.
5. A double-reed wind instrument similar to an oboe with a somewhat strident, nasal sound.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "I heard someone say that the name of God is not chanted at a certain place. No sooner did he say it than I saw that God Himself had become all living beings and the phenomenal universe.[1] It is like countless bubbles, reflections, of water. And I saw that they were like innumerable pills.

"One time when I was going to Burdwan from Kamarpukur, I ran toward a field to see how the creatures in it lived and ate. When I got there, I saw ants crawling on the ground. It seemed that every place was imbued with Consciousness."

Hazra now enters the room and sits on the floor.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I also saw flowers with different kinds of petals. Some were small, and others were large images."

While talking of these divine visions, Thakur enters into an ecstatic state. He says, "I have become! I have come!"

Saying this, he becomes absorbed in samadhi. He is absolutely motionless. After a long time, he regains a little consciousness of the outer world. He begins to laugh like a child. He paces the room, laughing.

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1. sarvabhūtastham ātmānaṁ sarvabhūtāni cātmani ।
īkṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ ।। Bhagavad Gita 6:29 (The Self in all beings and all beings in the Self).

One attains the state of a paramahamsa when one is rid of grief and desire – Thakur's description of a paramahamsa under the banyan tree whom he saw while practicing spiritual disciplines

Thakur's eyes emanate a luminosity of joy after a wonderful vision. A smile plays on his face. His gaze is unfixed.

Pacing up and down, he speaks: "I saw a paramahamsa under the banyan tree. He was walking and smiling in the same way. Has my nature become like his?"

Having paced the room, Thakur goes to the smaller cot and sits down. He talks to the Mother of the Universe, saying, "Well, I don't want to know. Mother, may I only have pure love for Your lotus feet."

(*To Mani*) "This stage is attained only when one is freed from grief and desires."

Next he speaks to the Divine Mother, "Mother, You have taken away my worship. Please do not take away all my desires. Mother, a paramahamsa is a child. Doesn't a child need a Mother? You are the Mother and I am Your son. How can a child live without his mother?"

Thakur talks to the Divine Mother in a tone of voice so touching it could melt even a stone. He says to the Her, "Mother, merely the knowledge of non-dualism – I spit on that. As long as there is the feeling of 'I,' there is 'You' too. A paramahamsa is a child. Doesn't a child need its mother?"

Mani gazes in speechless wonder at this state of Thakur, which is rare even among the gods. He says

to himself, Thakur is an ocean of motiveless grace. It is for my faith, for awakening my own consciousness, and for teaching humanity that he has assumed the role of a guru and taken this state of a paramahamsa.

Mani reflects further. Thakur says, "Non-dualism, Consciousness, and Eternal Bliss."[1] That it is only after attaining the knowledge of the non-dual Reality that Consciousness is awakened. And only then does one enjoy Eternal Bliss. Thakur not only has the knowledge of the non-dual Reality, but he is ever-blissful. He is ever immersed in the joy of intense love for the Mother of the Universe; he is ever intoxicated!

Observing Thakur in this state, suddenly Hazra folds his hands and now and then says, "Blessed. Blessed."

Sri Ramakrishna says to Hazra, "But where is your faith? You are here only like Jatila and Kutila[2] who served to develop the play."

It is late afternoon. Mani is strolling alone in the temple garden reflecting on Sri Ramakrishna's wonderful state of mind. He asks himself, Why did Thakur say that you attain this state only after getting rid of sorrow and desires? Who is this Thakur in the role of a guru? Or is he the advent of God Himself appearing in human form for our sake? Thakur says that one cannot come down from jada samadhi[3] unless one is an Ishvarakoti or a divine incarnation.

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1. Advaita, Chaitanya, and Nityananda.
2. Troublemakers in the Radha-Krishna story.
3. Nirvikalpa samadhi, complete absorption, so that all sense of duality is obliterated.

Chapter II

Secret talk

Āhus tvām ṛṣayaḥ sarve devarṣir nāradas tathā ।

asito devalo vyāsaḥ svayaṁ caiva bravīṣi me ।।

[All the rishis have thus acclaimed You, as also the Deva Rishi Narada, so also Asita, Devala, and Vyasa, and now you yourself say so to me.]

– Bhagavad Gita: 10:13

The next day Sri Ramakrishna talks alone with Mani in the Jhautala. It is about eight o'clock, Monday, 24 December 1883, the tenth lunar day of the dark fortnight. It is the eleventh day of M.'s stay with Sri Ramakrishna.[1]

It is winter. The sun has just appeared in the eastern sky. West of the Jhautala the Ganges is flowing north. There has just been a flood tide. There are trees and creepers all around. Not far away one can see the vilwa tree under which Thakur had practiced spiritual disciplines. Thakur is speaking now, facing the east. Mani faces north and listens to him in all humility. To the right of Thakur is the panchavati and Hanspukur. The winter sunrise spreads like a smile over the world. Thakur talks about the knowledge of Brahman.

Totapuri's instructions to Thakur about the knowledge of Brahman

Sri Ramakrishna: "God with form is as true as the formless God.

"The Naked One used to instruct me about Sat-chit-ananda Brahman. He would say that It is like

1. Prabhu, master.

an infinite ocean, with water above, below, right, and left, water everywhere – the cause, water. The water is still. There are waves when it is acting. Creation, preservation, and dissolution are its waves.

"And he would say that Brahman is where all reasoning ends. It is like camphor, which leaves no residue after it is burnt.

"Brahman is beyond speech and mind. A salt doll went to fathom the ocean. It never returned to tell its depth. It dissolved into the ocean itself.

"The rishis said to Rama, 'Rama, Bharadvaja and other rishis speak of you as an incarnation of God. But we don't say that. We worship the Shabda Brahman.[1] We don't want a human form of God.' Rama smiled, accepted their adoration, and left."

The Absolute and the phenomenal world are both true

"But the Absolute and the phenomenal belong to the same reality. As I said earlier a roof and the steps to it are made of the same material. There is divine sport as God, as gods, as human beings, and as the world. God-incarnate is His sport as a human being. You know, the sport as a human being is like water accumulated on a big roof rushing down through a drain pipe. It is the power of Sat-chit-ananda that takes its course through the pipe. Only twelve rishis, Bharadvaja and others, recognized Ramachandra as an avatar and declared him so. Not everyone can recognize a divine incarnation."

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1. Sound Brahman, referring to Om, the Impersonal.

Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation of God? – life of Thakur from his own lips – Kshudiram's dream in Gaya – his worship by Hriday's mother – Mathur's vision of God within Thakur – possessed by Sri Gauranga in Phului Shyambazaar

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "God incarnates as a human being to teach knowledge and love of God. Well, how do you feel about me?

"My father went to Gaya. Raghuvir appeared to him in a dream and said, 'I shall be born as your son.' Seeing him in his dream, my father said to Him, 'Lord, I am a poor brahmin! How shall I be able to serve you?' Raghuvir replied, 'It will be taken care of.'

"My sister, Hriday's mother, used to worship my feet with flowers and sandal-paste. One day, touching my feet to her head, I (the Divine Mother in me) said to her, 'You will quit your body in Kashi.'

"Mathur said, 'Father, there is nothing but God within you. Your body is like an empty shell, like the form of a pumpkin outside but with no pulp or seeds inside. Once I saw you as someone walking and wearing a veil.'

"I am shown everything beforehand. Once, under the banyan tree (at the panchavati), I saw a party of singers with Chaitanya. I think I saw Balaram in it, and also you.

"I wanted to know Chaitanya's states of mind and was shown them at Shyambazaar. There were men on trees, on walls, people surrounding me day and night. For seven days I had no time even to

answer the call of nature. So I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, I have had enough!' So it is all over now.

"I shall have to incarnate again. That is why I don't give full knowledge to my intimate disciples. (*Smiling*) Were I to give you complete knowledge, would you come to me so readily again?

"I recognized you[1] when I heard you read the Chaitanya Bhagavata. You are my own – the same substance, like father and son. All of you who come here are like a bunch of kalmi creeper. Pull one part and it all comes. You're related to each other like brothers. Suppose Rakhal, Harish, and others have gone to Jagannath Puri. If you also go there, will you live separately?

"You were in a state of forgetfulness until you came here. Now you will be able to know yourself. God comes down as guru to make you know yourself."

Totapuri's instructions – God in the form of the guru makes one realize one's Self

"The Naked One told me the tale of the tiger and the goats. A tigress attacked a herd of goats. Seeing it from a distance, a hunter killed the tigress. She was pregnant, so a cub was born. That cub began to grow up in the midst of goats. At first it nursed on goat's milk. When it grew up a little, it began eating grass, and it began to bleat like the goats. In due course, it grew into a big tiger, but it

1. Referring to M.

still ate grass and bleated. If any animal attacked, it would run away like the goats.

"One day a fierce tiger attacked the herd of goats. It was amazed to see a tiger in the herd, eating grass and running away with the goats. He caught hold of the grass-eating tiger, which began to bleat and tried to run away. The wild tiger dragged it to the edge of a pond and said, 'Look at your face in the water. See, your face is just like mine, pot-faced.' Saying this, he thrust some flesh into its mouth. At first the grass-eating tiger absolutely refused to eat it. But after a while, getting its taste, it began to eat. The wild tiger said to it, 'You were living with goats and eating grass like a goat! Shame on you!' The grass-eating tiger felt very ashamed.

"Eating grass – that is, living in the midst of 'lust and greed' – bleating like a goat, and running away is the conduct of ordinary human beings. To go away with the tiger means to take refuge in the guru, who awakens spiritual consciousness, and to know that he alone is one's own, one's near and dear one. To see one's true face means to recognize one's own real Self."

Thakur stands up. There is silence all around. Only the rustling of wind in the pine trees and the murmuring of the Ganges are heard. He passes the railing and begins walking with Mani through the panchavati to his room, talking with him all the while. Mani accompanies him. enchanted as though by a magic spell.

Sri Ramakrishna bows down at the panchavati

Reaching the panchavati, he stands under the foot of the banyan tree where a big branch had fallen off. Facing east, he bows to the brick platform and touches it with his forehead. This is the place where he had practiced spiritual disciplines and had wept so with a yearning heart for the Divine Mother, where he had had so many visions of the forms of God and conversations with the Divine Mother. Is it for this reason that whenever Thakur comes to this spot, he offers salutations?

After his visit to the bakultala, he comes near the nahabat. Mani is with him.

Nearing the nahabat, he sees Hazra and says to him, "Don't overeat. And give up your worry about purity and impurity. People who worry excessively about such things do not attain spiritual knowledge. Only observe the prescribed rituals that are necessary. Don't overdo it." Then Thakur goes into his room.

Chapter III

Rakhal, Ram, Surendra, Latu, and other devotees with Sri Ramakrishna

Thakur is resting after his meal. Today is 24 December and the Christmas holidays have started. Surendra, Ram, and other devotees are arriving from Calcutta.

It is about one o'clock. Mani is strolling around the jhautala alone. Standing near its railing, Harish calls out to Mani, "Thakur wants you. There is going to be a reading from the Shiva Samhita." It contains instructions on yoga and the six centres.

Mani enters Thakur's room, salutes him, and takes a seat. Thakur is sitting on his cot; the devotees are on the floor. But there is no reading of the Shiva Samhita. Instead Thakur himself speaks to them.

Ecstatic love of God[1] and sport at Vrindavan – God-incarnate and His activity as a human being[2]

Sri Ramakrishna: "The gopis had intense love for Krishna. There are two aspects of ecstatic love: '*I*-ness'[3] and '*my*-ness.'[4] 'If I don't serve Krishna, he will become sick' – this is *I-ness*. There is no feeling of God in this attitude.

"My-ness – that is feeling 'my and mine.' The gopis had such a feeling of my-ness for Sri Krishna that, lest his soles should get hurt, they laid their subtle bodies under his feet.

"Yashoda said, 'I don't know your Chintamani[5] Krishna. I only have my Gopala.'[6] And the gopis said, 'Where is my sweetheart, my Beloved?' They also did not have the feeling of his being God.

"We see young boys saying, 'My father.' If someone says to one of them, 'No, he is not your father,' he would insist that he is indeed his father.

"An incarnation of God conducts himself just like a human being. That is why it is very difficult to recognize an incarnation. Born as a human

1. Prema bhakti.
2. Nara lila.
3. Ahamta.
4. Mamta.
5. Beloved God.
6. Baby Krishna.

being, He acts just like one – the same hunger and thirst, the same disease and sorrow, even fear at times, just like a human being. Ramachandra was stricken with grief for Sita. Sri Krishna carried the shoes and wooden stool of his father Nanda on his head.

"When an actor plays the role of a holy man in the theatre, he acts just like a holy man – and not like the actor who takes the role of a king. He acts as his role demands.

"A quick-change artist played the role of an all-renouncing sadhu. Seeing him dressed that way, a gentleman offered him a rupee. He didn't accept it, but left, saying, 'No.' After he had washed and returned in his normal dress, he said, 'Now let me have the rupee.' The gentleman said, 'Only a while ago you went away saying you wouldn't take the rupee. Now you are asking for it?' The man said, 'I was playing the role of a sadhu. How could I accept the rupee then?'

"It is the same with God. When He assumes the form of a human being, He conducts Himself exactly like a human being.

"When one visits Vrindavan, one can see so many places associated with Krishna's life."

Instructions to Surendra – charity in service of devotees and telling the truth

Surendra: "I went there during the holidays. Visitors are pestered constantly for money, 'Please give a pice. Please do.' All the priests started

asking. I said to them, 'I'll be leaving for Calcutta tomorrow.' But I fled the very same day."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why did you do that? For shame! You said you would go the next day but ran away the same day. Shame!"

Surendra (*feeling ashamed*): "Here and there I saw babajis seated in the forest. They were meditating and repeating the name of God in solitude."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Did you offer anything to the babajis?"

Surendra: "No, Sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That was not right. Something should be offered to sadhus and devotees. Those who have money should offer something when they come across such persons."

Life of Thakur from his own holy lips – visit to Vrindavan in 1868 with Mathur

"I went to Vrindavan with Mathur Babu.

"As soon as I got to the Dhruva ghat in Mathura, I suddenly had a vision. I saw Vasudeva crossing the Jamuna with Krishna in his arms.

"And one evening I was strolling on the bank of the Jamuna. There were little huts on the beach. There were also big jujube trees. At dusk the cows started returning from pasture. I saw them crossing the Jamuna. They were followed by a number of cowherd boys.

"No sooner did I see them than I shouted, 'Where are you Krishna?' and I became unconscious.

"I wanted to visit the Shyamkunda and Radhakunda. I was sent in a palanquin. It was a long way. They put some luchis and jilipis in the palanquin. While crossing the meadow, I wept and said, 'O Krishna! All these places are here, but you are not! It is the same field where you used to graze cows.'

"Hriday was following me on foot. Tears fell from my eyes. I could not ask the palanquin men to stop.

"I saw in Shyamkunda and Radhakunda that the sadhus had built huts for themselves. Lest they should be disturbed by the sight of anything, they were practicing spiritual disciplines with their backs to the outside. The twelve forests are worth seeing.[1]

"I went into a deep spiritual mood when I saw the image of Bankuvihari. I tried to touch Him. I didn't feel a desire to see Govindaji a second time. In Mathura, I had seen Krishna as a cowherd boy in a dream. Hriday and Mathur Babu had the same dream."

Surendra, a devotee of the Divine Mother – union with God and enjoyment of sense objects[2]

1. There are twelve forests in the 1453-square-mile area surrounding Vraja, the scene of Krishna's play. Each is associated with a different exploit, and each is a place of pilgrimage.
2. Yoga and bhoga.

"You have both – striving for union with God and desire for enjoyment.

"There are brahmarishis, devarishis, and rajarishis. Sukadeva was a brahmarshi – he didn't keep one book with him. Narada was a devarishi, Janaka a rajarishi – he performed work without expectation of any reward.

"The devotee of the Divine Mother attains both virtue and liberation[1] and also enjoys wealth and the fulfillment of legitimate desires.[2]

"One day I saw you in a vision as a son of the Divine Mother.[3] You have both the desire for God and for enjoyment. If you didn't have them, your face would look dry."

Sri Ramakrishna meets a devotee of the Divine Mother at the bathing ghat – Nabin Niyogi's desire for God and desire for enjoyment

"A person who has renounced completely looks dry. I met a devotee of the Divine Mother at the bathing ghat. He was eating and at the same time worshiping the Divine Mother. He was like a child before his mother.

"But it's not good to have too much money. Jadu Mallick seems to be sunk in worldliness. You see, he has now become very wealthy.

"As for Nabin Niyogi, he has both desire for God and desire for enjoyment. At the time of Durga Puja

1. Dharma and moksha.
2. Artha and kama.
3. Deviputra.

both the father and the son were fanning the Mother with a chamara."[1]

Surendra: "Sir, why can't I concentrate when I meditate?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "But you remember and think of God, don't you?"

Surendra: "Yes sir. I go to sleep repeating, 'Mother, Mother.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That is very good. Remembrance and thinking of God are enough."

Thakur has taken upon himself the responsibility of Surendra. Why then should he worry?

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna's instruction on union with God – Shiva Samhita

After dusk Thakur sits with his devotees. Mani is seated on the floor with them. The topic of conversation is yoga and the six centres of consciousness. The Shiva Samhita deals with them.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ida, pingala, and sushumna. All the lotuses are in the sushumna and are formed of consciousness. Think of a tree made of wax. It has branches, twigs, and fruit all made of wax. The kundalini power resides in the bottom, four-petalled muladhara lotus. The Primal Power dwells in all bodies in the form of Kundalini. It is like a sleeping snake coiled up. 'You have been fast asleep, coiled up in Your abode of muladhara.'

1. A fan made from the tail of a yak.

(*To Mani*) "In the path of Bhakti Yoga, the kundalini awakens rapidly. One cannot realize God unless the kundalini wakes up. Sing with full concentration, in solitude, without the knowledge of others:

> Waken, O Mother Kundalini! You are the very image of Bliss Eternal.
>
> You have been fast asleep, coiled up in Your abode of muladhara.

"Ramprasad perfected himself by his songs. If you can sing with a longing heart, you realize God."

Mani: "Sir, by experiencing these only once, one has no more distress of mind."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah! You no more have distress. Yes indeed.

"I would like to tell you a few important things about yoga."

Everything indeed is done by the guru – spiritual practice and spiritual perfection – Narendra born spiritually perfect

"You know, a mother bird doesn't peck the egg till the chick inside has developed. She breaks it open just at the right time.

"A little spiritual practice is necessary, however. Everything is done by the guru, but in the end he makes the disciple practice a little. When you fell a big tree, you have to step away from it a little when it is nearly cut through. Then it falls by itself with a great crash.

"When a canal is cut from a river to bring water to the fields, the farmer stands aside when the

canal is about to join the river and only a little cutting remains. Then the earth itself gets soaked and falls of itself, letting the water flow into the canal.

"When you get rid of ego and limitations[1] you realize God. When you get over the feeling of being a learned man, the son of a certain person, of being wealthy, famous, and so on, you realize God.

"Only God is real, all else is ephemeral. The world is transitory. This is called discrimination. Without discrimination, the mind does not assimilate spiritual instructions.

"By practicing spiritual disciplines, you attain perfection by His grace. Of course some effort is necessary, but it ultimately ends in realization of God and attainment of bliss.

"A pot of gold lies buried at a certain place. Hearing about it, a man quickly runs there and starts digging. He continues to dig, sweating with the effort. After digging a long time he hears a sound 'tan' at the stroke of the spade. He throws away the spade and looks for a vessel. Seeing the pot, he dances with joy.

"Then he takes the pot out and turns it upside down. Gold coins fall into his hand and he counts them. It is such a joyful experience – seeing, touching, enjoying! Isn't that true?"

Mani: "It is, sir."

Thakur is silent for a while and then he resumes speaking.

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1. Adjuncts.

Who are my very own? – instruction about fasting on ekadashi[1]

"Those who are my very own will come to me even if I reprimand them.

"Ah, look what a fine nature Narendra has! In the beginning, he used to say anything he liked about Mother Kali. Getting irritated one day, I said to him, 'Rascal, don't come here again!' He went out quietly and began to prepare a smoke. He who is one's own does not become annoyed even when scolded. What do you say?"

Mani: "True, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Narendra is born perfect. He has faith and single-minded devotion[2] to the formless God."

Mani (*laughing*): "Whenever he comes, he creates excitement."

Thakur laughs, full of joy: "True, he does create commotion."

The next day is Tuesday, 25 December, the 11th day of the dark fortnight. It is about eleven o'clock. Thakur has not been served his meal yet. Mani, Rakhal and other devotees are in his room.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "It is good to observe the ekadashi. It purifies the mind a great deal and develops love and devotion for God. Do you think so?"

Mani: "Yes, sir."

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1 The eleventh day of the lunar month.
2. Nishtha.

Sri Ramakrishna: "But it's all right to have milk and puffed rice,[1] don't you think?"

1. Khil.

Section IX

At the Dakshineswar Temple with Rakhal and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar temple with Rakhal, Ram, Kedar, and other devotees – conversation on brahmajnana with a Vedantist sadhu

Sri Ramakrishna is getting into a carriage to visit the Kali temple at Kalighat. He will first stop at Adhar Sen's house, from where Adhar will accompany him. It is Saturday, 29 December 1883, the new moon day.[1] It is about one o'clock.

The carriage is standing near the northern verandah of Thakur's room. Mani approaches the door of the carriage.

Mani (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Sir, may I go with you?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why?"

Mani: "I would like to visit my house in Calcutta."

Sri Ramakrishna (*with concern*): "Must you go? You are all right here."

Mani wants to go home for just a few hours, but Thakur is not in favour of it.[2]

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1. Amavasya.
2. M. has been staying with Thakur for two weeks, since 14 December, and intends to stay longer. Sri Ramakrishna is not in favour of his breaking his retreat with a visit home.

It is Sunday, 30th December, the first day of the bright fortnight of the month of Pausha. The time is about three o'clock.

While Mani is strolling alone under a tree, a devotee comes and tells him that Thakur wants to see him. Thakur is sitting with devotees in his room. Mani salutes him and takes his seat on the floor with the devotees.

Ram, Kedar, and others have come from Calcutta. A Vedantist monk is with them. Thakur had met him the day he went to see Ram's garden. The monk had been sitting alone on a cot under a tree in the adjacent garden. Ram has now brought him to see Thakur, at Thakur's request. The monk had also expressed a desire to see him.

Thakur talks happily with the monk. He has made him sit close by, on the smaller cot. They are speaking in Hindi.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do you feel about all this?"

Monk: "It is all like a dream."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Brahman is real and the world unreal.[1] Is that not so? Well, what is Brahman like?"

Monk: "Sound itself is Brahman – the anahata sound."[2]

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1 The reference is to Shankara's dictum "Brahma satyam jagat mithya…." According to Shankara, what is real (satyam) is eternal and unchanging, and what is unreal or false is ephemeral and changing (mithya).

2. Unstruck, a sound produced on its own without two objects being struck together; Om as the first movement of Shiva-Shakti heard in higher states of meditation.

Sri Ramakrishna: "But my dear, there is something which is indicated by the sound. Isn't that so?"

Monk: "That itself is both the expresser and the expressed."[1]

Hearing this, Thakur goes into samadhi. Motionless, he sits like a picture. The monk and devotees witness this state in speechless wonder. Kedar says to the sadhu, "Look, sir. This is called samadhi."

Thakur slowly returns to the conscious plane and talks to the Mother of the Universe: "Mother, I want to be normal. Please don't make me unconscious. I want to talk to the sadhu about Sat-chit-ananda. Mother, I want to enjoy myself talking about Sat-chit-ananda!"

The monk sits speechless watching and listening to all this. Thakur says to him, "Now do away with your 'I am He'.[2] Let us enjoy 'I' and 'You.'"

> Is Thakur saying that as long as there is the feeling of 'I' and 'You,' there is the Divine Mother as well, so let's come and enjoy ourselves with Her?

After some time, when the conversation ends, Thakur strolls in the panchavati. With him are Ram, Kedar, M., and some others.

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1. vācyavācakabhedena tvameva parameśvara: "O Supreme Lord, You are distinguished as vachaka, the signifier, and vachya, the object signified" – Adhyatma Ramayana.
2. So 'ham.

Sri Ramakrishna instructs Kedar – renunciation of the world

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What did you think of the sadhu?"

Kedar: "He has dry knowledge. Just like a pot that's been put on the fire but no rice has been put in it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's true, of course. But he has renounced the world. Whoever has renounced the world has progressed a good deal.

"He is in an earlier stage. All your achievements are of no account unless they lead to the realization of God. Nothing else is appealing when one is intoxicated with ecstatic love. Then:

Cherish the beloved Mother Shyama in your heart.

O mind, may you and I alone behold Her, and let no one else intrude.

Leaving behind all passions, anger and such vices, come, O mind, and let us behold her in solitude,

Taking with us only the tongue, that it may call on Her now and then, repeating, "Mother, Mother!"

O mind, allow neither baseness nor enticement to draw near, but let the eyes of knowledge, ever alert, keep watch.

Kedar sings another song of the same mood as that of Thakur:

O gopi friend! How can I open my heart to you? I am not allowed to speak.

Without a kindred soul to share my grief, I am about to die.

He who is one's own can be known by the look in his eyes.

Such a one is rare who swims on the wave of ecstasy, immersed in bliss.

Such a one can ride its crest.

Thakur has returned to his room. It is four o'clock, and Mother Kali's temple is open. He goes there, taking the monk with him. Mani accompanies them.

Entering the temple, Thakur prostrates before the Divine Mother with full devotion. The monk folds his hands, bows his head, and salutes the Mother repeatedly.

Sri Ramakrishna: "My dear sir, what do you think of the Mother?"

Monk (*with devotion*): "Kali is the supreme power."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Kali and Brahman are identical, are they not?"

Monk: "As long as the mind is outgoing one must accept Kali. As long as the mind goes out, one feels there is good and bad, and one has likes and dislikes.

"Certainly names and forms are illusory, but as long as the mind sees the outside world, one must renounce 'lust.' One has to distinguish between what is good and what is not in order to instruct others in the beginning. Otherwise, there would be corruption."

Thakur returns to his room, talking with the sadhu on the way.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Did you see the sadhu bow before Kali?"

Mani: "Yes, sir."

The next day, Monday, 31 December. The time is about four o'clock. Thakur is seated in his room in the company of devotees – Balaram, Mani, Rakhal, Latu, Harish, and others.

Mere words of knowledge – Thakur rebukes Haladhari

Thakur says to Mani and Balaram:

"Haladhari had the attitude of a jnani. He studied the Adhyatma Ramayana, the Upanishads, and similar scriptures day and night. And he would look with disdain when someone talked about the forms of God. Once when I took a little food from the leaf-plates of beggars, he said, 'How will you be able to get your sons married?' I said, 'What do you mean, you rascal? Am I going to have children? To hell with your study of the Gita and the Vedanta.'

"Just see, on the one hand he says that the world is an illusion, and on the other, he meditates in the Vishnu temple with nose turned up in disgust!"[1]

It is dusk. Balaram and the other devotees have left for Calcutta. Thakur is meditating on the Divine Mother in his room. After some time, the sweet sound of arati emanates from the temples.

It is about 8 p.m. Thakur is in an ecstatic mood and talking to the Divine Mother in a sweet voice. Mani is sitting on the floor.

1. He professes to be a Vedantist who has gone beyond duality, but his behavior shows otherwise.

Sri Ramakrishna and Vedanta

Thakur is chanting the sweet sacred name, "Hari Om, Hari Om, Hari Om." He says to the Divine Mother, "O Mother, don't make me unconscious with the knowledge of Brahman. I don't want knowledge of Brahman, Mother. I want to enjoy myself! I want to be merry!"

Then he says, "I don't know Vedanta, Mother. And I don't want to know it! Having attained You, the Veda and the Vedanta remain so far below."

"O Krishna! I say to you, 'Eat this, take this, my child.' And I shall say, 'Child, you have assumed a human body for my sake.'"

Chapter II

Path of knowledge and discrimination – path of devotion and knowledge of Brahman

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room. It is about 8 p.m., Wednesday, 2 January 1884, the fifth day of the bright fortnight of Pausha. Rakhal and Mani are in the room. It is the 21st day of Mani's stay with Sri Ramakrishna.

Thakur has forbidden Mani to reason.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Rakhal*): "It is not good to reason too much. First God, then the world. Attain Him and then you will know about His world as well.

(*To Rakhal and Mani*) "When you talk to Jadu Mallick, you will know how many houses, how many gardens, and how many government securities he has.

"That is why the rishis asked Valmiki to repeat the word *mara*. It has a special meaning. 'Ma' means God and 'ra' means the world – first God, and then the world."

The sacred word *mara* and Krishnakishore

"Krishnakishore said, '*Mara* is a sacred mantra since rishis gave it. 'Ma' means God and 'ra' means the world.'

"So, like Valmiki, in the beginning one should call on God secretly, in a solitary place, weeping with a mind full of yearning, renouncing everything else. A vision of God is the first thing that is necessary. Reasoning about the scriptures and the world come after that."

Thakur weeps while on the road – Mother, strike a thunderbolt to my tendency to reason, 1868[1]

(*To Mani*) "So I say to you, don't reason any more. I came from the pine grove just to say this to you. Reasoning too much causes harm in the end – ultimately you become a person like Hazra. I used to walk around alone at night, weeping and saying, 'Mother, strike my tendency to reason with a thunderbolt!'"

"Say you won't reason any more."

Mani: "No, sir, I shall not."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Everything can be attained by love for God alone. Those who want the knowledge of Brahman will have it if they continue on the path of love.

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1. Referring to an incident that took place in 1868.

"Can there be any dearth of spiritual knowledge if God grants His mercy? In Kamarpukur they weigh paddy by pushing forward more paddy as soon as the first heap is done. The Divine Mother pushes forward heaps of spiritual knowledge."

Padmalochan's devotion to Thakur – Thakur's prayer in the panchavati during his days of spiritual practices

"When you have realized God, scholars and the learned appear like mere straw. Padmalochan said, 'What does it matter if I go with you to the meeting in the fisherman's house? With you I can even go and eat at the house of a person who cremates the dead.'[1]

"Everything can be achieved through love for God. When you can love Him, you feel no lack of anything at all. Karttika and Ganesha were sitting beside Bhagavati (their mother). She was wearing a necklace of jewels round her neck. The Mother said, 'I will give this necklace to one who goes around the universe first.' Immediately, without losing a second, Karttika set out on his peacock. Ganesha, on the other hand, went slowly round his mother and saluted Her. Ganesha knew that the Mother contained the whole universe within Herself. Pleased with Ganesha, She put the necklace around his neck. After a long time Karttika returned and saw his brother sitting there wearing the necklace.

"I wept and cried to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, please make me understand what the Vedas and the Vedanta contain. Please tell me what is in the

1. Both fisherman and cremation men are low-caste Hindus.

Puranas and the Tantras.' She made everything known to me, one by one.

"She made everything known. She has shown me so much!"

Thakur's visions while practicing spiritual disciplines: Shiva and Shakti, heaps of human skulls, guru the pilot, the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda

"One day Shiva and Shakti were revealed to me everywhere, the union of Shiva and Shakti. Everything – human beings, birds and beasts, plants and creepers, everything – had Shiva and Shakti within! The union of Purusha and Prakriti!

"And one day I was shown a heap of human heads as high as a mountain. There was nothing else. I was seated alone in their midst.

"And another time I was shown a vast ocean. I went to measure it as a salt doll. As soon as I tried, through the grace of the guru, I became a stone. I saw a ship. Immediately I boarded it. The guru was the pilot. (*To Mani*) Do you call on Sat-chit-ananda, who is the guru, every morning?"

Mani: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The guru was the pilot. I saw then that 'I' was one thing and 'you' another. Then I jumped into the ocean and became a fish. I saw that I was swimming joyfully in the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda.

"These are all very secret mysteries. How much can you understand by reasoning? You achieve everything when God Himself reveals them to you. Then you lack nothing."

Chapter III

Meditation under the bel tree during the days of spiritual practice, 1859-61 – renunciation of "lust and greed"

Sri Ramakrishna visits his birthplace – registration of Raghuvir's land, 1879-80

Thakur has been served his midday meal. It is about one o'clock, Saturday, 5 January. It is the 23rd day of Mani's stay.

After eating, Mani is in the nahabat. He suddenly hears someone call his name three times. He comes out and sees Thakur calling him from the long verandah north of his room. Mani goes to him and salutes.

Thakur talks with Mani on the southern verandah.

Sri Ramakrishna: "How do you meditate? I used to have clear visions of different forms under the bel tree. One day I saw silver coins, a shawl, a plate full of sandesh, and two women. I asked my mind, 'O mind! Do you want any of these?' The sandesh looked to me like excrement. One of the women had a big nose ring. I could see both their insides and outsides – guts, urine, faeces, flesh, bones, and blood. My mind did not want any of these. It remained attached to the lotus feet of God alone.

"Think of a scale, with its lower and upper needles. The mind is the lower needle. I was always in fear that my mind would move away from the upper needle (God). But a person sat beside me with a trident in his hand. He threatened to attack

me if the lower needle moved away from the upper one.

"You cannot succeed unless you renounce 'lust and greed.' I renounced three things: land, wife, and money.[1] I went to the village to get some land registered in the name of Raghuvir. I was asked to sign the deed. I did not. I didn't think of the land as mine. I was shown great respect as the guru of Keshab Sen. I was given mangoes – but I couldn't take them home. A sannyasin must not hoard.

"How can one expect to realize God without renouncing? If one thing is lying under another, how can you reach it without removing the one on top?

"One must call on God without expecting any reward. But when one worships God with the intention of fulfilling desires, it finally becomes selfless. Dhruva practiced austerities to get a kingdom, but he realized God. He said, 'If one comes across gold while picking up glass, why leave it there?'"

Sri Ramakrishna and compassion, charitable acts – Chaitanya Deva's act of charity

"God can be realized only when one has acquired sattva.

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1. bhikṣuaḥ sauvarṇādīnāṁ naiva parigrahet।
yasmād bhikṣurhiraṇyaṁ rasena dṛṣṭaṁ ca sa brahmāhā bhavet।
yasmād bhikṣurhiraṇyaṁ rasena spṛṣṭaṁ ca sa paulkaso bhavet।
yasmād bhikṣurhiraṇyaṁ rasena grāhyaṁ ca sa ātmahā bhavet।
tasbhād bhikṣurhiraṇyaṁ rasena na dṛṣṭaṁ ca spṛṣṭaṁ na grāhyaṁ ca। (paramahaṁsopaniṣat)

"Charitable acts of the worldly are generally motivated. This is not good. One should act without expectation of any reward – but it is very difficult to work selflessly.

"If God reveals Himself to you face to face, will you pray to Him to grant you a boon to build reservoirs, roads, bathing steps, dispensaries, hospitals, and so forth? When you are in the presence of God, such desires are left behind.

"Does that mean that an act of compassion or of charity is of no use?

"No, it is not that. If you have money and you see someone suffering, you should help him with it. A jnani, a man of knowledge, says, 'Give. Give something to him.' But he feels, 'What can I do? God alone is the doer, everyone else is a non-doer.'

"Stricken by sorrow over the troubles of others, saintly people show the way to God. Shankaracharya retained the ego of knowledge to teach humanity.

"The gift of spiritual knowledge and love for God is higher than the gift of food. Therefore, Chaitanya Deva disseminated bhakti even among outcastes.[1] The body is prone to sorrow as well as happiness. You have come here to eat mangoes. Eat them and leave. Spiritual knowledge and love for God are what is needed. God alone is the substance, all else is nothing."

1. Chandalas.

Does free will exist? Sri Ramakrishna's dictum

"Indeed, it is God who does everything. You may say that implies that people may commit sin. That is not true. A person who truly feels that God is the Doer and he a non-doer cannot take a false step.

"What the English (westerners) call free will is also given by God.

"If God had not given free will, sin would have increased. If God had not given the feeling that I am responsible for my own actions, there would be much more sin.

"But those who have realized God know that free will is only an appearance. In fact, He is the operator and I am an instrument. He is the driver and I am the car."

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna, the guru – he cries and prays for devotees

It is four o'clock. Rakhal and a few other devotees are listening to Mani's singing.

He sings:

> Lying prostrate a hundred times outside the room, he then enters slowly.

Rakhal goes into an ecstatic mood when he hears the song.

After some time Sri Ramakrishna goes to the panchavati. Baburam,[1] Harish, and Rakhal are with him.

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1. Later Swami Premananda.

After a while Mani arrives.

Rakhal: "He has made us happy by singing such sweet songs today."

Sri Ramakrishna, passing into a divine mood, sings:

O friend! I am revived on hearing Krishna's name.

(*To Mani*) "Sing songs like this: 'All the friends sat together. O, Radha was quite well only a moment ago. Perhaps her ecstatic mood has suddenly disappeared.'"

Then he adds, "And what else? Just live with love for God and devotees."

Conversation between Radha and Yashoda – Sri Ramakrishna's relatives

"When Krishna went to Mathura, Yashoda came to Radha. Radha was absorbed in meditation. When it was over, she said to Yashoda, 'I am the Primal Power. You may ask me for a boon.' Yashoda said, 'What other boon can I ask? Let me be able to serve Him with body, mind, and speech. Let me be able to see God's devotees with these eyes, to meditate on Him with this mind, and to sing God's name and glories with my tongue.'

"But those who are highly developed spiritually can even do without the company of devotees. At times they don't have a liking for the company of devotees. The lime of whitewash won't stick to a mother of pearl surface. In other words, this is the state of a person who sees God both within and without."

Returning from the pine grove, Thakur says to Mani under the panchavati, "You have a feminine voice. Can you practice singing such songs as this: 'Friend, how far is that wood where my Shyama Sundara is …'?

(*To Mani, looking at Baburam*) "See, those who are my own have become strangers – Ramlal and other relatives seem no longer to be my near and dear ones. And those who were strangers have become my relatives. Just see how I say to Baburam, 'Go and answer the call of nature. Now go and wash your face.' The devotees have indeed become my own."

Mani: "True, sir."

Thakur practiced spiritual disciplines in the panchavati in 1857-58, before the state of madness for God – Consciousness as Power[1] and Consciousness as Self[2]

Sri Ramakrishna (*glancing at the panchavati*): "I used to sit in the panchavati [and practice spiritual disciplines]. In course of time I became mad for God. That, too, passed away. Kala (time) indeed is Brahman. She who sports with Kala is Kali. She is the Primal Power. She even moves the immovable."

Saying this, Thakur sings:

Wondering about Her mystery, my mind is overwhelmed at the thought of Her who removes the fear of death.

At Her feet lies Mahakala, Death Himself, and I wonder why She should be so black.

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1. Chitsakti.
2. Chidatma.

"Today is Saturday. Please visit Mother Kali's temple."

Approaching the bakul tree, Thakur says to Mani, "Chidatma and Chitshakti. Consciousness as Self is the male aspect of God[1] and Consciousness as Power the female aspect.[2] Sri Krishna is Consciousness as Self, and Radha Consciousness as Power. Each one of the devotees is an individual form of that Consciousness as Power.

"The devotees should think of themselves as companions or as servants. This is the important thing."

Thakur goes to the Kali temple when it is dusk. He is pleased to see Mani meditating on the Divine Mother there.

Thakur weeps before the Mother of the Universe for the devotees – blessing the devotees

The arati has been performed in all the temples. Thakur is seated on his wooden cot in his room, meditating on the Mother of the Universe. Only Mani is there, seated on the floor.

Thakur is in samadhi.

After some time, he returns to normal consciousness. He is now filled to the brim with divine feeling. He talks to the Divine Mother lovingly, like a baby insisting demands on its mother. He says in a piteous tone of voice, "Oh Mother, why have You not revealed Your form to me, Your world-bewitching form! I have entreated

1. Purusha.
2. Prakriti.

You so many times, but You don't listen to my entreaties! You only do as you want."

The tone of voice he uses would melt even a stone.

Thakur again talks to the Divine Mother.

"Mother, I want faith. Let that rascal reason disappear. You reason seven times, but it disappears at once. I want faith – faith in the words of the guru, the faith of a child! A mother says to her child, 'There is a ghost,' and the child fully believes that there is indeed a ghost. The mother says, 'There is a bugbear there,' and the child fully believes it. The mother says, 'He is your elder brother.' He believes more than a hundred percent that he is indeed his brother. I want faith!

"But Mother, why should the devotees be blamed? What else can they do? It is necessary to reason once before you accept anything. See how much I implored him the other day, yet nothing happened. And today, so suddenly –"

Thakur weeps and prays to the Divine Mother in a sorrowful tone, his voice choked with emotion.

How amazing! He is crying before the Divine Mother for the sake of devotees!

"Mother, please fulfill the desires of those who come to you. Don't make them renounce completely. Well, do what you like in the end.

"Mother, if you keep him [referring to M.] in the world, please reveal Yourself from time to time. Otherwise, how will he live? How will they be encouraged, Mother, if You don't reveal Yourself

every now and then? But after that, do what you like."

Sri Ramakrishna is still absorbed in an ecstatic mood when he suddenly says to Mani, "Look here, you have already reasoned enough. No more of it. Promise that you will not reason any more."

Mani folds his hands and says, "I will not."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You have done enough reasoning. When you came in the beginning, I told you your spiritual ideal. I know everything about you."

Mani (*gratefully*): "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Hearing that you had children, I reprimanded you. Now go home and live with them. Show them that you are their very own. But know in your heart that you are not their own, nor are they yours."

Mani keeps silent. Thakur continues to speak.

Sri Ramakrishna: "And love your father. Since you have now learned to fly, will you be able to salute before him?"

Mani (*folding his hands*): "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What more can I say to you? You know all this. Understand it?"

Mani keeps silent.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you understand all this?"

Mani: "Sir, I understand only partially."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You understand well enough. Rakhal is staying here, and his father is pleased."

Mani folds his hands but does not say anything. Sri Ramakrishna adds, "What you are thinking will also happen."

With devotees in the joy of song – Divine Mother and earthly mother – why does God play as a human being?

Thakur has now returned to normal consciousness. Rakhal and Ramlal are in the room.

Thakur asks Ramlal to sing. Ramlal sings:

Who is this woman who lights up the battlefield?[1]

He sings another song:

Dancing, deep-dark like the darkest storm-cloud over the field of battle,

She looks like a freshly bloomed lotus, floating on a blood-red sea.

Sri Ramakrishna: "The Divine Mother and the earthly mother. She who pervades everything, becoming the entire universe, is the Divine Mother. She from whom you are born is the earthly mother. I used to merge into samadhi repeating, 'Mother, Mother.' It is as though I would pull the Mother of the Universe toward myself, the way a fishermen throws a net and drags it for some time. Then many big fish are caught in the net."

Gauri Pundit's words – Kali and Gauranga are one and the same

"Gauri said, 'One gains true spiritual knowledge when one realizes that Kali and Gauranga are one and the same.' That which is Brahman is indeed

1. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section XX, Chapter II.

Shakti (Mother Kali). In human form She is Gauranga."

> Is Thakur suggesting that the Primal Power has come in the human form as Sri Ramakrishna?

At Thakur's behest, Ramlal sings of the divine sport of Sri Gauranga:

> In Keshab Bharati's hut what did I behold? The exquisite, bright form of Sri Gauranga, his eyes streaming with tears of love![1]

And again:

> The wave of Gaur's love has touched my body.[2]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "He who is the Absolute is also the phenomenal world. His divine sport is for the sake of devotees. A devotee can love Him only when he can be seen in human form. Then alone is he able to love Him as a brother or sister, father or mother, or son or daughter.

"For the love of the devotee, He comes down as a human being to enact His play."

1. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section XII.
2. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section XVI, Chapter I.

Section X

With Rakhal, Latu, M., Mahima, and Others at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna injures his arm – while in samadhi he talks to the Mother of the Universe

Sri Ramakrishna is living in the same room at the Dakshineswar temple. It is three o'clock on Saturday, 2 February 1884, 20th of Magha, 1290 B.Y., the sixth day of the bright fortnight.

One day when Thakur was going alone to the pine grove, he fell near the railing in an ecstatic mood. A bone of his left arm was dislocated and caused him severe pain. M. has now brought him a splint, a pad, and bandages from the devotees in Calcutta.

Rakhal, Mahimacharan, Hazra, and some other devotees are in the room. M. comes in and prostrates before Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Hello. Have you been ill? Are you all right now?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahima*): "Tell me, brother, why this happened when 'I am the instrument and you the Operator?'"

Thakur is seated on his wooden cot, listening to Mahimacharan talk about his visits to places of

pilgrimage. The visits took place twelve years before.

Mahimacharan: "I saw a brahmachari in the Sikrol garden in Benares. He said he had been there for twenty years. But he didn't know whose garden it was. He asked me, 'Sir, do you work in an office?' I replied, 'No.' Then he asked, 'Then are you a wandering holy man?'

"I saw a sadhu on the bank of the Narmada. He was chanting the Gayatri mentally. The hair on his body stood on end. Then he chanted the Gayatri and Om out loud in such a way that it thrilled everyone sitting near and made their hair stand on end."

Thakur has the nature of a child. Feeling hungry, he asks M., "Well, what have you brought?" He looks at Rakhal and goes into samadhi.

When the samadhi is over and he returns to normal consciousness, he says, "I shall eat jilibi. I want some water to drink."

Weeping like a child, he says to the Mother of the Universe, "Brahmamayi, why have you done this to me? My arm hurts badly!" (*To Rakhal, Mahima, Hazra, and the others*) "Will my hand be cured?"

The devotees console him as they would a child, "Why not? It will surely get well."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Rakhal*): "It's not your fault, even though you're here to look after me. Even if you had gone with me, you wouldn't have gone as far as the railing."

Sri Ramakrishna in the mood of child – 'a million salutations to the knowledge of Brahman'.

Thakur again becomes absorbed in a deep spiritual mood. He says, "Om, Om, Om, Mother! What am I saying? Please Mother, don't make me unconscious by giving me the knowledge of Brahman. I am only a child – easily afraid. I want Mother! A thousand farewells to the knowledge of Brahman! Give it to those who want it. O, All-Blissful Mother! The All-Blissful Mother!"[1]

Thakur weeps as he says loudly, "The All-Blissful Mother, the All-Blissful Mother!" Then he says:

> This is the grief that weighs on my heart: though You, my Mother, are here and I am wide awake, thieves of passion rob my house.[2]

Thakur then says to the Divine Mother, "What wrong have I done, Mother? Have I done anything wrong? It is You who do everything, Mother. I am an instrument, You are the Operator."

(*To Rakhal, smiling*) "Take care that you also don't fall. Don't be full of pride and hurt yourself."

Thakur again says to the Divine Mother: "Am I crying because of the hurt? No, it's just that:

> This is the grief that weighs on my heart: though You, my Mother, are here and I am wide awake, thieves of passion rob my house.

1. Anandamayi.
2. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section XX, Chapter V.

Chapter II

How to call upon God: yearn for Him

Sri Ramakrishna now laughs and talks like a child, just as a child sometimes laughs and plays even though seriously ill. He talks to Mahima and the other devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you have not realized Sat-chit-ananda, you have done nothing – nothing at all, my dear sir.

"There is nothing like discrimination and non-attachment.

"The love of worldly people for God is only momentary, transient like a drop of water falling on a hot plate. Seeing a flower, he may say, 'Ah, how wonderful is God's creation!'

"Yearning for God is essential. When a son bothers his parents for his inheritance, the parents consult one another and give him his share in advance. When you are earnest, God is sure to listen. Since He has created us, we certainly have a share in His house. He is our Father and Mother. We can force Him. 'Reveal Yourself to me or I will cut my throat with a knife!'"

Thakur is teaching the devotees how to call on the Divine Mother: "I used to pray to the Divine Mother this way, 'O, All-Blissful Mother, reveal Yourself to me if You are indeed there.'

"And at times I would say, 'Come, O Lord of the humble, Lord of the Universe,[1] I am not outside the

1. Jagannath.

universe. Lord, I am without knowledge, without spiritual discipline, without love and devotion. I know nothing. Be kind and reveal yourself to me.'"

Speaking in the most touching tone of voice, Thakur teaches the devotees how to call on God. When they hear these touching words, their hearts melt. Tears fall from Mahimacharan's eyes. Noticing this, Thakur adds:

> Cry out with yearning, O mind, and see how Mother Shyama can withhold Herself from you![1]

Chapter III

Devotees from Shivapur and the power of attorney – Dr. Madhu

Devotees from Shivapur have arrived. Having made great effort to come such a distance, Sri Ramakrishna cannot remain silent. He talks to them about very important things.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the Shivapur devotees*): "God alone is the reality, all else is ephemeral. Take the case of the owner of a garden. God and His splendour. People only see the garden. How many want to find out who the owner is?"

A devotee: "Sir, what is the way?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Discriminate between what is real and what is unreal. Reflect constantly on this: God alone is the reality, all else is ephemeral. Call on Him with yearning."

A devotee: "But, sir, where is the time?"

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1. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section I, Chapter V.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Those who have time should practice meditation and chanting of God's name. Those who cannot do so should bow down to God very lovingly and with respect, both morning and evening. God is the ruler within the heart, He understands what people of the world have to do. You have no time to call on Him. Therefore, you must give Him the power of attorney. If you do not realize Him, if you do not see Him, you have not achieved anything."

A devotee: "Sir, seeing you is the same as seeing God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Never say that again. The waves belong to the Ganges, the Ganges doesn't belong to the waves. Unless you rid yourself of the idea, 'I am a big man – I am so and so,' you cannot realize God. Level the hill of your 'I' by drenching it with the water of love for God."

Why family life? – when desire for enjoyment is over, one feels yearning for God and realizes Him

A devotee: "Why has He kept us in the world?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "To keep the creation going. That is His will. That is His maya. God has bewitched us with 'lust and greed.'"

A devotee: "Why has He bewitched us? Why does He will this?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "If He granted the bliss of God even once, no one would live a householder's life. And that would lead to the end of creation.

"Rice is stocked in big bags in a warehouse. So that rats don't find the rice, the grain dealer keeps

some puffed and sweetened rice in a husking pan. The rats like the sweetened rice and eat it through the night. They don't look for the bagged rice.

"But look, you can make fourteen times the volume of one seer of rice with puffed sweetened rice. How great is the bliss of God compared to the joy of 'lust and greed!' Contemplating His beauty, even the beauty of Rambha and Tilottama[1] appears like ashes from a fire."

A devotee: "Why don't we develop that yearning to realize God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A person doesn't feel yearning for God until the desire for enjoyment is over. Until the desire for 'lust and greed' is satisfied, a person doesn't remember the Mother of the Universe. A child busy playing doesn't look for his mother. When his play is over, he says, 'I want to go to my mother.' Once Hriday's son was playing with a pigeon. He was calling out to it, 'Come here, tee tee!' As soon as he had enough of playing, he began to cry. A stranger came by and said, 'Come, I'll take you to your mother.' The boy even climbed on the man's shoulders to be taken.

"Those who are born perfect[2] don't have to go through the householder's life. They are already free from the desire for enjoyments since their birth."

1. Two beautiful celestial dancing girls.
2. Nityasiddhas.

Dr. Madhu arrives – Madhusudana and the importance of God's name

It is five o'clock. Dr. Madhu has arrived. He is going to put Thakur's hand in a splint and bandage it. Thakur laughs like a child and says, "Here is the Madhusudana[1] of this world and also of the next."

Dr. Madhu (*smiling*): "I am burdened carrying the weight of my name."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Why? Is the name insignificant? There is no difference between God and his name. When Satyabhama was weighing the Lord against gold and jewels in a scale, it didn't balance. But when Rukmini put the tulsi leaf with the name of Krishna written on it, lo, it balanced!"

The doctor is going to tie the splint on Thakur's hand. A bed is made on the floor. Thakur, laughing, lies down on it. He chants, "Radha is in her last stage. Vrinde says, who knows what else is going to happen?"

The devotees sit around Sri Ramakrishna, who sings:

> All the gopi friends of Radha sat together on the lake shore.

Thakur laughs. So do the devotees. When the splint has been tied, Thakur says: "I don't have much faith in doctors from Calcutta. Sambhu was delirious, but the doctor (Dr. Sarbadhikari) said, 'This is nothing – it is only the medicine that makes you feel groggy.' Just after that, Sambhu died."[2]

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1. A name of Krishna.
2. Shambu Mallick died in 1877.

Chapter IV

Instruction to Mahimacharan

Evening arati has been performed in the temples. Soon after, Adhar arrives from Calcutta and prostrates before Thakur. Mahimacharan, Rakhal, and M. are in the room. Hazra comes in and out of the room.

Adhar: "How are you?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately*): "Look how I have hurt my arm. (*Smiling*) How could I feel?"

Adhar sits on the floor with the devotees. Thakur says to him, "Please stroke my hand."

Adhar, seated toward the north of the smaller cot, strokes Sri Ramakrishna's feet instead. Thakur talks to Mahimacharan.

The important thing is spontaneous love for God[1] – know your own real Self

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahima*): "Love for God that wells up spontaneously from the depths of the soul – it would be very good if you could practice that.

"I want none of these – liberation, name and fame, wealth, or recovery from disease. I only want You. This is selfless love. Many people go to visit a rich gentleman and ask for things. If there is one who doesn't want anything from him but has only come out of love, that person gets any amount of love from him.

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1. Ahetuki bhakti.

"Prahlada had unselfish love. His love for God was pure and motiveless."

Mahimacharan says nothing. Thakur adds, "Well, I'm going to tell you something that you will agree with. Just listen. According to Vedanta, one has to know one's own real Self. But this isn't possible without first renouncing 'I-ness.' This 'I' is like a stick which appears to split water into two parts: I am one and You are another.

"On attaining samadhi, 'I-ness' disappears and one has the inner consciousness[1] of Brahman.

> Perhaps some of the devotees are asking themselves, Has Thakur attained the knowledge of Brahman? If he has attained it, why is he using the word *I*?

Thakur continues, "You must renounce the 'I' which says, 'I am Mahima Chakravarty, a learned man.' However, there is no harm in the 'I of knowledge.' Shankaracharya retained the 'I of knowledge' to teach mankind.

"Unless you are very cautious about 'lust,' you cannot attain the knowledge of Brahman. For this reason, it is difficult for one who leads a worldly life. However clever you may be, you will get a black stain on your body if you live in a room of lampblack. In the company of a young woman, even a man without desire develops a feeling of passion. "But there is no harm if a man of knowledge[2] cohabits with his wife occasionally. Discharge of semen is just like other eliminations – defecation,

1. Bodhe bodha.
2. Jnani.

urine, and so on. After answering the call of nature, a person forgets all about it.

"It is like eating half a sweetmeat![1] (*Mahima laughs*). It is not so harmful for a householder."

Difficult rules for sannyasin and Sri Ramakrishna

"But it is very wrong for a sannyasin. The sannyasin must not even look at a picture of a woman. For sannyasins, keeping the company of women is like swallowing spit already spat out.

"A sannyasin must not sit near women and talk with them, even if they are extremely devout. He should not talk with them even though he may have controlled his passions.

"A sannyasin must renounce both lust and gold. Just as he must not look at the picture of a woman, he must not touch gold – money. Having money near is bad in itself. With money comes keeping accounts, worry, pride of wealth, and anger at others. You are looking for the sun and, lo, it is covered by clouds!

"That's why when a rich Marwari wanted to deposit money with Hriday for our use, I said, 'No. Not even this. Clouds will arise wherever there is money.'

"Why such difficult rules of conduct for a sannyasin? They are there for the instruction of humanity as well as for his own good. Even if a sannyasin lives unattached, having controlled his

1. Sri Ramakrishna is referring to a sweetmeat made of cheese.

senses, he should renounce 'lust and greed' in order to teach mankind.

"People will muster the courage for renunciation only if they see the one hundred percent renunciation of a sannyasin. Then only will they endeavour to renounce 'lust and greed.'

"If a sannyasin doesn't impart this instruction of renunciation, who else will?"

Janaka and others entered worldly life after realizing God – the rishi and eating pork

"One should lead a householder's life only after attaining God. It is like keeping butter in water after it has been churned. Janaka led the life of a householder only after attaining the knowledge of Brahman.

"Janaka wielded two swords: one of spiritual knowledge and the other of action. A sannyasin renounces work. Thus he wields only one sword, that of knowledge. Householders who are men of knowledge, like Janaka, can eat both the fruit off a tree and fruit on the ground. They can serve holy men and entertain guests as well. I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, I don't want to be a dry sadhu.'

"After attaining the knowledge of Brahman, one doesn't discriminate about food. The rishis who had attained the knowledge of Brahman and experienced the bliss of Brahman could eat any food, even pork."

Four stages of life [ashramas] – the essence of yoga and Sri Ramakrishna

(*To Mahima*) "Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of yoga: Karma Yoga and manoyoga – union with God through work and union through mind.

"There are four stages of life: brahmacharya (celibate student life), garhasthya (family life), vanaprastha (life of retirement, non-attachment, and contemplation of God) and sannyasa (complete renunciation). Work is necessary in the first three stages of life. Although a sannyasin carries a staff, a water pot, and a begging bowl and may perform daily Vedic duties,[1] his mind is not attached to them. He is not conscious of them; his mind is attached only to God. A few sannyasins attend to daily duties only to teach mankind. If a householder or a person of the other stages of life can perform work without expectation of any reward, he attains union with God through such work.

"In the case of a paramahamsa like Sukadeva and others, all work falls off – such actions as worship, repetition of the name, offering of water to the deities,[2] and daily evening prayer.[3] In this state there is union with God in the mind alone. Such a person performs work outwardly at times for the instruction of mankind. But his mind remains always in remembrance and contemplation of God."

1. Nityakarma.
2. Tarpana.
3. Sandhya.

Chapter V

Thakur hears Mahimacharan's reading of the scriptures and goes into samadhi

The conversation continues to about 8 p.m. Thakur asks Mahimacharan to chant some verses from the scriptures. Mahimacharan takes a book and chants the first verse of the Uttara Gita concerning the Supreme Brahman:

He, Brahman, is one – partless, stainless, and beyond the ether.

Without beginning or end, unknowable by mind or intelligence.

In due course, he chants the seventh verse from the third chapter.

Fire is the deity of brahmins;

the deity of sages is in the heart;

for people of average intelligence, the deity is the image;

and for the great yogi who perceives oneness, the deity is everywhere.

When Mahimacharan chants the phrase "for the great yogi who perceives oneness, the deity is everywhere," Thakur suddenly rises from his seat and goes into samadhi. His arm is still bound with splints and bandages. The devotees are wonder-struck as they watch this great yogi of similar vision.

He stands in this way for quite some time before returning to normal consciousness and resuming his seat. He asks Mahimacharan to chant the verses about love for God. Mahima chants from the Narada Pancharatra:

If God is worshipped with devotion, what is the need for austerities?

If He is not so worshipped, what again is the use of austerities?

If Hari is both inside and outside, what need is there of austerities?

And if He is not there, what is the use of austerities?

If you worship Hari, what need is there of austerities?

And if you do not, what is the use of austerities?

So, O brahmin, detach yourself, dear boy.

What is the need of austerities?

Go at once to Shankara, the ocean of Knowledge.

Attain the deep devotion for Hari, of which the Vaishnavas speak.

From Him you'll learn how to love the Lord. Such love has been spoken of by Vishnu's worshipers,

A love that never fails, a love that like a sword cuts asunder the fetters of this world.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah! Ah!"

Vessel and the universe – You are Knowledge and Bliss Absolute – not I, not I

Hearing these verses, Thakur is again about to go into ecstasy and controls it only with difficulty. Now a passage from the Yatipanchaka is chanted:

I am She, the Divine Mother, the embodiment of consciousness, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, who is the Self of the universe, in whom this appearance of the moving and unmoving is seen, being the play of Her mind.

Hearing, "I am She, the embodiment of consciousness," Thakur laughs, "What is in the vessel[1] is also in the universe."[2]

Now he recites the Six Stanzas on Nirvana from the Nirvana Ashtakama.

> Om, I am neither the mind, the intellect, the ego, nor the mind-stuff,
>
> Nor I am the ears, the tongue, the nostrils, the eyes.
>
> I am neither the sky nor earth nor fire nor air.
>
> Neither am I ether, sky, nor the earth; neither heat nor air.
>
> I am pure Knowledge and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva!

Whenever Mahimacharan repeats, "I am pure Knowledge and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva!" Thakur says with a smile:

"Not I, not I – You, You, You are pure Knowledge and Bliss!"

Mahimacharan reads the description of the six spiritual centers from the Jivanmukti Gita. He says that he himself had witnessed the death of a yogi in the state of yoga at Benares. He describes the terrestrial and aerial mudras.[3] He also talks about sambhavi, when one wanders about aimlessly.

His earlier story – Thakur hears narration of the Rama Gita from sadhus

Mahima: "The Rama Gita has many beautiful things to say."

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1. Bhanda.
2. Brahmanda.
3. Bhuchari and khechari mudras, expressions of particular states of consciousness or yogic awareness.

Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "You are a confirmed Vedantist to talk so much of the Rama Gita. How many books like it the sadhus used to read here!"

Mahima reads the description of Om:

> It is like an unceasing flow of oil, like the long peal of a bell.

Then he reads about the characteristics of samadhi:

> The man established in samadhi sees the upper region filled with Atman, the nether region filled with Atman, the middle region filled with Atman. He sees all filled with Atman.

Adhar and Mahimacharan salute Sri Ramakrishna and leave.

Chapter VI

State of intoxication – guilelessness and telling the truth

The next day is Sunday, 3 February 1884, 21st day of Magha, 1290 B.Y., the seventh day of the bright fortnight of Magha. Thakur is seated on his cot after the midday meal. Worried when they heard of his injury, Ram, Surendra, and some other devotees have come from Calcutta. M. is seated near Sri Ramakrishna, who has his hand in a splint. He talks with the devotees.

His earlier story – state of divine inebriation, stay in Janbazar – guilelessness and telling the truth

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "The Divine Mother has kept me in such a state that I can't hide anything. It is the state of a child.

"Rakhal doesn't understand. Lest anybody should notice it and then talk ill of me, he covers my arm by wrapping a cloth around my body. He took Doctor Madhu aside and told him all about it. Then I shouted, 'Where are you, Madhusudana? Come and see, I have broken my arm!'

"I used to sleep in the same bedroom with Mathur Babu and his wife.[1] They loved me and looked after me as if as I were their child. I was in a state of divine inebriation at that time. Mathur Babu would say, 'Father, do you hear what we say?' I would say, 'Yes, I do.'

"Suspecting her husband of something, Mathur's wife said, 'If you go anywhere, Bhattacharya Mahashay (Sri Ramakrishna) will accompany you.' Once he went to a certain place and made me sit downstairs. Returning in half an hour, he said, 'Come on, Father, let's go to the carriage.' When his wife questioned me, I told her exactly what had happened. I said to her, 'Look, we went by carriage. He made me sit downstairs, and he went upstairs alone. Returning in half an hour, he said to me, "'Come on, father! Let's go.'" She figured it out as well as she could.

"A partner of Mathur's estate used to take cart-loads of cauliflower and fruits from the temple garden to his home. When the other partners asked me, I told them all this exactly."

1. Sejo Ginni.

Section XI

With Rakhal, M., Manilal, and Others at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

Why is Thakur impatient? He instructs Mani Mallick

Thakur is resting after the midday meal while Mani Mallick sits on the floor of the room. Thakur's arm is still in a splint. M. enters, salutes him, and then sits on the floor near Mani Mallick. It is Sunday, 24 February 1884, 13th of Phalgun, 1290 B.Y the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "How did you come?"

M.: "Sir, I came by carriage to Alambazar and then walked from there."

Manilal: "Oh, you are sweating!"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "This makes me think that all my experiences are not fantasies. If that were so, why would 'Englishmen'[1] take so much trouble to come here?"

The topic of conversation is now about Thakur's injured arm and how he is feeling.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Sometimes I get impatient because of my arm. I show it to one person after another and ask if it will heal. Rakhal gets angry. He doesn't understand my condition. Sometimes I say to myself, let him leave me if he likes. But then I ask the Divine Mother, 'Where will he go, Mother?

1. Anglicized men.

Where will he go to be scorched and burnt in the fire of the world?'

"I had this childlike impatience before. I used to show my pulse to Mathur Babu and ask him, 'Brother! What am I suffering from?'

"Well, where is my faith in God if I did this? When I was going to Kamarpukur in a bullock cart, some men with long sticks came up. They looked like dacoits.[1] I began to chant the names of God. I chanted Rama, then I chanted Durga, then Om Tat Sat, hoping that one would be helpful.

(*To M.*) "Tell me, why am I so impatient?"

M.: "You're always in samadhi. You have kept a little of your mind on the body for the sake of the devotees. That is why you sometimes become impatient to save it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. I only have a little of my mind on the body, and that for the sake of the devotees and to enjoy the love of God."

Proposal to visit an exhibition – talk about Thakur's visit to the zoo

Manilal Mallick is talking about an exhibition.

Thakur's eyes are filled with tears to hear about a beautiful image of Yashoda with the baby Krishna in her arms. He is inspired by Yashoda's embodiment of maternal love and thus weeps.

Manilal: "You are not well, or you could visit the exhibition in the maidan of the fort."

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1. Highwaymen.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and others*): "I won't be able to see everything even if I go. I might lose consciousness just seeing one thing that is special. I wouldn't be able to see anything more than that. Once I was taken to the zoo. I went into samadhi when I saw a lion, the vehicle of the Mother Goddess. How could I see the other animals? I only saw the lion and then came back. That's why Jadu Mallick's mother first said that I should go to the exhibition and then, on second thought, said, 'No, No.'"

Mani Mallick has been a member of the Brahmo Samaj for many years. He is about sixty-five years old. Thakur is teaching him according to his nature.

His earlier life story – visit to Jai Narayan Pundit – Gauri Pundit

Sri Ramakrishna: "Jaynarayan Pundit was a very liberal person. I visited him once and liked his attitude. His sons were all wearing boots. But he said, 'I shall go to Kashi.' He finally did so. He lived in Kashi and he died there.[1]

"When you get old, it's good to leave the household and devote yourself to contemplating God. What do you think?"

Manilal: "Yes. I don't like the problems of the world."

1. Sri Ramakrishna had met the pundit for the first time in 1869. Pundit Jai Narayan (1804-1873) visited Kashi in 1869.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Gauri used to worship his wife with offerings of flowers. All women are different manifestations of the Divine Mother.

(*To Manilal*) "Please tell that story of yours."

Manilal (*laughing*): "Several people were going across the Ganges in a boat. One among them, a pundit, talked very highly of his learning. 'I have studied various scriptures – the Vedas, the Vedanta, and the six systems of philosophy.' He asked someone, 'Do you know the Vedanta?' The man replied, 'No, sir.' 'Do you know Samkhya and Patanjali?' He said, 'No, sir.' 'Have you no philosophy at all?' 'No,' again.

"The pundit was talking proudly of himself, and the other man was sitting there silent. Just then a terrible storm arose. The boat was about to sink. The man asked the pundit, 'Revered sir, do you know how to swim?' The pundit said, 'No.' The man replied, 'I don't know Samkhya and Patanjali, but I do know how to swim.'"

God alone is the substance, all else is unsubstantial – hitting the target

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What is the use of knowing many scriptures? All you need is to know how to cross the river of the world. God alone is the real substance, all else is unsubstantial.

"While Arjuna was aiming at the target, Drona asked him, 'What are you seeing? Do you see the kings?' Arjuna said, 'No.' 'Do you see me?' 'No.' 'Do you see the tree?' 'No.' 'Do you see the bird perched

on the tree?' 'No.' 'Then what do you see?' 'Only the eye of the bird.'

"He who only sees the eye of the bird can hit the target.

"He alone is clever who sees that God alone is the real substance and all else is unsubstantial. What is the need for any other information? Hanuman said, 'I don't know much about the date or the position of the planets. I only contemplate Rama.'

(*To M.*) "Buy a few fans to use here.

(*To Manilal*) "Please visit his (M.'s) father. Inspiration comes from seeing a devotee."

Chapter II

Advice to Manilal and others – God's manifestation as a human being

Sri Ramakrishna is seated on his bed. Manilal and other devotees are sitting on the floor, listening to Thakur's sweet words.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "A deep change is coming over me since I hurt my arm. Now I only like God's manifestation as a human being.

"The Absolute and the phenomenal.[1] The Absolute is the indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

1. Nitya and lila.

"The divine play, or the phenomenal, is play as God, play as deities, play as human beings, and play as the universe."

You are Sat-chit-ananda – instruction by Vaishnavcharan – Thakur watches the *Ramlila*

"Vaishnavcharan used to say, 'One attains the highest knowledge after having the faith that God sports as a human being.' I didn't listen to him then. Now I see that he was right. Vaishnavcharan liked pictures of men expressing tenderness and love.

(*To Manilal*) "It is God who manifests in the form of a human being. He Himself has become Mani Mallick. The Sikhs teach: You are Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.

"Sometimes, seeing a glimpse of his real self, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, a man becomes speechless with wonder. He begins to swim in joy. It is just like suddenly coming across a near and dear relative. (*To M.*) Just as it happened to me the other day in the carriage when I saw Baburam – and you were also in the carriage.

"When Shiva sees his own real self, he dances around exclaiming, 'What am I! What am I!'

"The Adhyatma Ramayana also talks about this. Narada said, 'O Rama! All men are your forms, and all women are Sita's.'

"When I saw the actors in the *Ramlila*, I felt as if Narayana (the Lord) Himself was dwelling in their various forms. I felt that the real and the imitations were the same.

"Why do people worship young virgins?[1] All women are different forms of the Divine Mother, but She manifests Herself more in pure, unmarried girls."

Why is Thakur impatient with his injury? – his state as a child and a devotee

(*To M.*) "Why do I become impatient when I'm ill? The Mother has kept me in the state of a child. A child depends entirely on its mother."

Sri Ramakrishna is photographed in the Radhabazar by Surendra – A.D. 1881

"I was taken to the Radhabazar for a photograph. I was supposed to go to Rajendra Mitra's house that day and was told that Keshab Sen and others would be there. I had planned to talk about a few important things but forgot them all when I went to Radhabazar. I said, 'Mother, You please speak. What can I say?'"

His earlier story – Koar Singh – Ramlal's mother – worship of the unmarried girl

"I don't have the disposition of a man of knowledge. A man of knowledge thinks very highly of himself. He says, 'How can I be ill?'

"Koar Singh said, 'You are still concerned with your body.'

"This is my nature: my Divine Mother knows everything. She would talk in Rajendra Mitra's house. Only Her words are 'real words.' A thousand

1. Kumari puja.

pundits are struck dumb before the knowledge of Saraswati.[1]

"The Divine Mother has kept me in the state of a devotee, in the state of a vijnani. That is why I make jokes with Rakhal and others. If I were in the state of a jnani, I couldn't do this.

"I see in this state that the Divine Mother alone has become everything. I see Her everywhere.

"I saw in the Kali Temple that the Divine Mother had become everything – even the wicked, even the brother of the Bhagavata pundit.

"I was about to reprimand Ramlal's mother but couldn't do it. I saw her as a form of the Divine Mother. I see the Divine Mother in virgins. That is why I worship them.

"My wife strokes my feet. I salute her afterwards.

"You salute me by touching my feet. Who could touch my feet when Hriday was here? He wouldn't let anyone touch them.

"The Divine Mother has kept me in the state of seeing God in everything. That is why I return your salutations.

"You see, I can't exclude even a wicked person. A tulsi leaf may be dry or small, but it can still be used for the worship of God."

1. The Goddess of knowledge and learning.

Section XII

Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal, Ram, Nitya, Adhar, M., Mahima, and Other Devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

Why is Sri Ramakrishna restless in illness? – the state of a vijnani

After the midday meal Sri Ramakrishna is sitting with Rakhal, Ram, and some other devotees. He is not completely recovered; his arm is still in a splint. It is Sunday, 23 March 1884, the 11th day of Chaitra, 1290 B.Y.

Though Sri Ramakrishna himself is not well, he has created a mart of joy in his room. Groups of devotees visit him, delighted with his incessant talk about God. Sometimes there is devotional singing and other times they watch Thakur in wonder as he enjoys the bliss of Brahman in samadhi.

Narendra's marriage: Narendra, the leader

Ram: "Narendra is going to be engaged to R. Mitra's daughter. Mr. Mitra says he will give a lot of money."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "He may become a leader in society, or something like that. Wherever his path leads, he will prove his worth."

Thakur does not allow the topic of Narendra to continue.

(*To Ram*) "Well, why do I get so restless when I'm ill? First I ask one man how I can get well, then I ask another.

"Do you know what the fact is? One should either believe everyone or no one.

"God Himself has become the doctor or medic. That's why you have to put your faith in all of them. If you simply think of doctors as humans, you won't have faith in them."

His earlier story – illness of Sambhu Mallick and Haladhari

"Sambhu was seriously ill. Dr. Sarbadhikari examined him and said, 'It is due to the heat of the medicine.'

"Haladhari put out his hand so that the doctor could feel his pulse. The doctor said, 'Let me see your eyes. Oh! You have an enlarged spleen.' Haladhari said, 'I have nothing of the sort!' But Dr. Madhu's medicine is good."

Ram: "It's not the medicine that heals, but it does help nature to cure."

Sri Ramakrishna: "If medicine doesn't do any good, why does opium stop diarrhea?"

About Keshab Sen – printing Thakur's talks in the *Sulabh Samachar*

Ram is talking about Keshab's death.

Ram: "You were right, 'A gardener exposes the roots of a superior rose plant so that the roots can absorb the dew to make the plant grow rapidly.' The words of perfected man have borne their fruit."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do I know, my dear? I didn't calculate when I said it. It is you who say so."

Ram: "The Brahmos have gotten something printed about you (in the *Sulabh Samachar*)."[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "Printed! What's this? Why do they print now? I just eat, drink, and make merry. I don't know anything else.

"I asked Keshab Sen, 'Why do you print anything about me?' He said, 'So people will visit you.'"

Instruction to mankind by the power of God – the wrestling match of Hanuman Singh

(*To Ram and others*) "A man hasn't the power to instruct mankind. One cannot subdue ignorance without the power of God.

"Two people wrestled – Hanuman Singh and a Punjabi Muslim. The Muslim was physically very strong. He ate a lot of meat and ghee on the day of the match and for fifteen days before it. Everyone thought he'd win. Hanuman Singh, on the other hand, clad in a dirty cloth, had eaten sparingly but had chanted the name of Mahavir.[2] On the day of the wrestling match, he kept a complete fast. Everyone thought he'd surely lose. But he won. The one who had been eating heavily for fifteen days lost.

"What is the use of publishing in papers? Whoever teaches mankind derives strength from

1. Brahmo magazine.
2. A name for Hanuman, the patron deity of wrestlers.

God. Besides, one cannot teach without having renounced."

His childhood – Sri Ramakrishna listens to the scriptures recited by sadhus at the home of the Lahas in Kamarpukur

"I am a most stupid person." (*All laugh.*)

A devotee: "Then how is it that so much of the Vedas and the Vedanta and other things come out of your mouth?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "During my childhood I could understand what the sadhus read at the Lahas' in Kamarpukur, but I would miss a little. If a pundit comes and speaks to me in Sanskrit, I can understand him. But I can't speak Sanskrit myself."

Is learning the goal of life? – the ignorant and God's grace

"The goal of life is to realize God. While aiming his arrow, Arjuna said, 'I can see nothing but the eye of the bird. I don't see the kings or the trees, not even the bird.'

"It is enough to realize God. It doesn't matter if you know Sanskrit.

"God grants His grace not only to pundits, but also to the ignorant if they long for Him. A father has equal love for all his children.

"Say a father has five sons. One or two call him 'baba' while some call him 'ba,' and some 'pa,' those who can't pronounce the whole word. Does the father love those more who call him 'baba' than the

ones who say 'pa?' The father knows that they are little children and can't pronounce *baba* correctly."[1]

Sri Ramakrishna's mind drawn to God's play as a human being

"My state of mind has been changing since I broke my arm. It is becoming drawn toward God's play as a human being. God Himself is playing as a human being.

"If God can be worshiped in a clay image, why can't He be worshiped as a man?

"The ship of a merchant sank near Ceylon.[2] He swam to the shore and was brought to Bibhishana on his orders. 'Ah! He looks like my Ramachandra! The same human form.' Saying this, Bibhishana was filled with exuberant joy. Dressing him with fine clothes and jewels, Bibhishana worshiped him, waving holy lights before him.

"When I heard this story for the first time I felt such great joy, I could not express it."

His earlier story – Vaishnavcharan – about Kartabhaja in Phului Shyambazar

"When I asked Vaishnavcharan, he said, 'The mind goes quickly to God when one accepts the beloved as one's chosen ideal.'[3] If someone asks, 'Whom do you love?' 'A certain person.' 'Then take him as your chosen ideal.' I said to those at Shyambazar near Kamarpukur, 'I have a different

1. See Max Muller's Hibbert Lectures [regarding the origin and growth of the conception of God historically and anthropologically].
2. Sri Lanka.
3. Ishta.

way. I look upon all women as the Divine Mother.' I have seen that those who talk big lead immoral lives. When the women asked me if they could attain liberation, I said, 'Yes, you will if you have single-minded devotion to one man, taking him as God.'"

Ram: "Perhaps Kedar Babu visited the Karta-bhaja sect."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He collects honey from many different flowers."

Haladhari's father – my father – ecstasy in Vrindavan at seeing cows return home

(*To Ram, Nityagopal and others*) "When you have one hundred percent faith that so-and-so is your chosen ideal, you realize God – you have His vision.

"People used to have great faith. What faith Haladhari's father had!

"He was going to his daughter's house. Seeing beautiful flowers and bel leaves, he gathered them for offering to the family deity, and he walked five or six miles[1] back to his home.

"There was a performance of the *Ramlila*.[2] Kaikeyi asked Rama to go into exile. Haladhari's father had gone to see the play. He stood up immediately and went up to the person who was playing Kaikeyi, exclaiming, 'You vile wretch!' He wanted to burn the actress's face with an oil lamp.

1. Two or three kosas.
2. A theatrical performance about the life of Rama.

"After taking his bath, he would stand in the water and chant, 'Raktavarṇaṁ caturmukham,'[1] then meditate, tears flowing down his cheeks.

"When my father walked on the road wearing wooden slippers, the shopkeepers would respectfully rise from their seats. They would say, 'See, there he comes.'

"When he would go to the Haldarpukur for his bath, other people would not have the courage to bathe at the same time. They would first find out if he had left after his bath.

"When he would repeat, 'Raghuvir, Raghuvir,' his chest would become very red.

"It was the same with me. When I saw the cows return from pasture in Vrindavan, my body would become red from ecstasy.

"People in those days had intense faith. I've heard people say that the Lord used to dance in the form of Kali when the devotees clapped!"

The hatha yogi of the panchavati

A yogi lives in the panchavati hut these days. Ramprasanna, the son of Krishnakishore of Ariadaha, and many others are devotees of this hatha yogi. But his opium and milk cost twenty-five rupees a month. Ramprasanna came to Thakur and said, "So many devotees come to you. Perhaps you could ask them to give something for the hatha yogi."

1. Invocation of the Deity as red-hued with four faces.

Thakur asks a number of devotees to go to the panchavati and see what kind of person the hatha yogi is.

Chapter II

Advice to Thakur Dada and Mahimacharan

Thakur Dada comes in with a couple of friends and salutes Thakur. He is about twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old and lives in Baranagore. He is the son of a brahmin pundit and practises the recital of scriptural and mythological stories.[1] He is saddled with family responsibilities. He had disappeared for some days in a mood of dispassion. Even now he practices spiritual disciplines.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Have you come on foot? Where do you live?"

Thakur Dada: "Yes, sir. I live in Baranagore."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What has brought you here?"

Thakur Dada: "Sir, I have come to see you. I pray to God. Why then do I sometimes become restless? Three or four days pass joyfully. Why do I feel so restless later?"

The mechanic – faith in the mantra – a devotee of God – two signs of knowledge

Sri Ramakrishna: "I understand. There are teething problems. Things aren't fitted right yet. A mechanic adjusts the machine so the cogs of the wheels fit together smoothly. Even so, it sometimes gets stuck a little somewhere."

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1. Kathakhatta.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Have you been initiated with a mantra?"

Thakur Dada: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you have faith in the mantra?"

A friend of Thakur Dada says that he can sing well. Thakur asks him, "Please do sing a song." Thakur Dada sings:

I shall live as a yogi in a cave of Love's mountain.

I shall sit absorbed in yoga beside the spring of bliss.

I shall gather the fruit of truth and satisfy my hunger for knowledge.

I shall worship the lotus feet of God with the flowers of dispassion.

I shall not go to the well for water to quench the thirst of separation,

But shall draw the water of peace to fill the vessel of my heart.

Climbing to the heights of ecstasy, I shall drink the holy water that has bathed Your feet. I shall laugh and weep and dance and sing!

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah! What a beautiful song! 'The spring of bliss! The fruit of truth! I shall laugh and weep and dance and sing!'

"You sing so beautifully. What more do you need? You have to face happiness and sorrow in worldly life. It is natural to feel restless once in a while. When you live in a room full of soot, you can't avoid its stain."

Thakur Dada: "Please tell me what I should do now."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Chant the name of Hari morning and evening, clapping your hands, 'Haribol, Haribol, Haribol.'

"And come again when my arm is healed a little."

Mahimacharan comes in and salutes Thakur.

(*To Mahima*) "Oh, he sang a very special and beautiful song! Do please sing it again."

Thakur Dada again sings: "I shall live as a yogi in a cave of Love's mountain."

When the song ends, Thakur says to Mahimacharan, "Please recite that verse – the one about devotion to Hari."

Mahimacharan recites a verse from the *Narada Pancharatra*:

> If God is worshipped with devotion, what is the need for austerities?
>
> If He is not so worshipped, what again is the use of austerities?
>
> If Hari is both inside and outside, what need is there of austerities?
>
> And if He is not there, what is the use of austerities?[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "Chant that one, too: 'From Him, learn how to love the Lord.' Mahimacharan chants:

> Desist, O my child, desist from further austerities.
>
> Hasten at once to Shiva, the ocean of divine knowledge.
>
> From Him, learn how to love with that pure love extolled by the lovers of God,

1. For the complete song refer to Section X, Chapter V.

A love that, like a sword, cuts asunder the fetters of the world.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Shankara will grant love and devotion to God."

Mahima: "The Eternal Shiva[1] is free from all bondage."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Shame, hatred, fear and suspicion – all these are bonds. What do you say?"

Mahima: "Yes, sir. Also secrecy and feeling embarrassed when praised."

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are two signs of spiritual knowledge. First, a firm understanding. One may have to face a thousand pains and sorrows, a number of catastrophes and obstacles, yet one remains steady, like the anvil in a blacksmith shop which receives so many hammer blows. Second is perseverance, inner strength: if lust and anger can hurt me, I shall immediately renounce them. When a tortoise pulls its limbs inside, it doesn't put them out again, even if you cut it into four pieces."

Deep dispassion, mild dispassion, and momentary dispassion

(*To Thakur Dada and others*) "There are two kinds of dispassion, deep and mild. Mild dispassion is slow, like a slow beat on the tabla. Deep dispassion, on the other hand, is like the sharp edge of a razor. It cuts the bondage of maya in two at once.

1. Sadashiva.

"A farmer was trying to cut a channel from the lake to his field for some days, but the water did not reach his field. He had no strength of mind. But another farmer resolves after three or four days that he will see to it that the water gets to his field that day. He postpones his bath, even eating. The whole day he labours hard, and in the evening water comes gurgling into his field. Oh, what joy! Then he returns home and says to his wife, 'Now let me have some oil. I'm going to have my bath.' Having taken his bath and eaten his dinner, he sleeps peacefully.

"A wife said to her husband, 'So-and-so has developed great dispassion, but you have attained nothing at all.' The man who had attained dispassion had a number of wives. He was giving them up one by one.

"The husband of the woman was just then going to take his bath. He had a small towel on his shoulder. Her said to his wife, 'Silly woman! That man won't be able to renounce the world. It can't be done little by little. But I can renounce. Just see. Here I go!'

"Without making any arrangements for his family, he left home as he was, with the towel on his shoulder. This is known as intense dispassion.

"There is another kind of dispassion. It's called monkey renunciation. A householder burned by the fire of worldly life puts on gerua and goes to Kashi. For many days there is no news about him. At last a letter is received, 'Please don't worry. I have found work here.'

"There are always burning problems in family life: your wife may be stubborn, you may be earning only twenty rupees a month, you have no money to celebrate your son's rice-eating ceremony,[1] you may have no means to send your boys to school, your home may be dilapidated, the roof may be leaking and you can't afford to get it repaired.

"That is why, when the boys visit me, I ask about their guardians or relatives.

(*To Mahima*) "Why do you need to give up family life? What troubles sadhus have to face! A wife said to her husband, 'Why do you want to renounce the family? You would have to beg alms from eight different houses. Instead, you get food from just one house. Isn't that better?'

"A sadhu may have to go out of his way six miles[2] to find a free meal. I've seen sadhus returning from Jagannath. They've had to leave the main road and take a detour to find an eating place.

"It's nice if you can fight from a fort. There are great disadvantages to standing in the open field and fighting from there. And dangers! Bullets may hit you.

"But for spiritual knowledge you must retire to a solitary place for few days. Then you can return to worldly life. Janaka lived a worldly life after attaining knowledge. You can live anywhere after attaining knowledge. Then nothing matters."

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1. Annaprasana.
2. Three kosas.

Mahimacharan: "Sir, why is man bewitched by things of the world?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Because he lives among them without having realized God. You don't get bewitched after realizing Him. A moth doesn't like darkness any more once it has seen light."

Unbroken continence, restricted continence[1] and God-realization – difficult rules for the sannyasin

"One has to observe strict continence to attain God.

"Sukadeva and people like him were men of absolute and unbroken continence.[2] They never discharged semen.

"There are others who have discharged semen earlier but now conserve it.[3] A person conserving semen for twelve years builds up a special power. He develops a new nerve of mental power.[4] When this nerve develops, one remembers everything, can know everything.

"The discharge of semen dissipates a person's strength. But there is no harm in nocturnal emission. That semen is from food. After discharge, a man retains enough to succeed. But he must not have intercourse with a woman.

"What remains after nocturnal discharge is very refined. The Lahas stored pots of molasses[5] with holes in the bottom. After a year it was found that

1. Udharva reta and dhairya reta
2. Udharva reta.
3. Dhairya reta.
4. Medha nadi.
5. Gur.

the molasses had turned into crystals, like sugar candy. Whatever liquid there was had come out through the holes.

"A sannyasin must completely renounce woman. However, there is no harm in your already having been involved.

"A sannyasin mustn't even see the picture of a woman. An ordinary person can't do this. Do re me fa so la ti. One can't stay long on ti.

"It is very harmful for a sannyasin to discharge semen. He has to be very careful not to even look at a woman. Even if she is a devotee, he must leave that place. Even to see the picture of a woman might cause the discharge of semen in a dream, if not in his waking hours.

"Even if a sannyasin has mastered his senses, he should not talk with a woman, as an example to mankind. Even if she is a devotee, he must not talk with her very long.

"A sannyasin is like one observing a waterless fast on the eleventh day of the lunar month.[1] There are two other kinds of fasts on the eleventh day: One, when one may eat fruits; and the other, when one eats fried luchi. (*All laugh.*) With the fried luchi, maybe you also have two chapattis soaked in milk. (*All laugh.*)

(*Smiling*) "You can't keep an absolutely waterless fast of the eleventh day of lunar month."

1. Nirjala ekadeshi.

His earlier life – Krishnakishore's ekadashi – Rajendra Mitra

"I saw Krishnakishore eating luchis and vegetable curry on an ekadashi day. I said to Hriday, 'Hridu, I'd like to observe Krishnakishore's ekadashi!' (*All laugh*.) I did it for a day. I ate till my stomach was full. The next day I couldn't eat a thing." (*All laugh*.)

The devotees who went to see the hatha yogi have returned. Sri Ramakrishna says to them, "Well, how did you find him? You measured him with your own yardstick, didn't you?"

Thakur noticed that hardly any of the devotees was willing to offer a rupee to the hatha yogi.

Sri Ramakrishna: "One doesn't like a sadhu he has to give money to.

"Rajendra Mitra earns eight hundred rupees a month. He had been to the kumbhamela in Prayag. I asked him, 'What kind of sadhus did you see at the mela?' Rajendra replied, 'I didn't come across one real sadhu. I noticed one, but even he accepted money.'

"I say to myself that if sadhus are not given any money how will they eat? You don't have to make any offering here; that's why people come here. I say to myself, 'Oh, how they love their money! So let them keep it.'"

Thakur rests for a while. One of the devotees is sitting on the north end of the smaller cot, gently stroking his feet. Thakur whispers to him, "He who is formless also has form. You must also accept God's forms. When an aspirant meditates on the

form of Kali, he has the vision of Kali. But later he finds that the form has merged into the Indivisible. He who is indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute is also Kali."

Chapter III

Mahima's scholarship – Mani Sen, Adhar, and the meeting

Thakur is on the western circular verandah talking about the hatha yogi with Mahima and others. Ramprasanna is the son of Krishnakishore, the devotee. That is why Thakur is fond of him.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ramprasanna just goes around doing nothing, like a vagabond. The other day he came here and sat down but didn't say a word. He just pressed his nostrils doing pranayama. He was given some refreshments, but he didn't eat them. Another day I called him and made him sit here. He sat with one leg over the other and a foot toward the Captain. I weep at his mother's sorrow.

(*To Mahima*) "He [meaning Ramprasanna] asked me to tell you about the hatha yogi. His expenses are six annas and two pice a day. But he wouldn't ask for it himself."

Mahima: "But who would listen if he himself asked?" (*Thakur and others laugh.*)

Going into his room, Thakur sits down. Mani Sen, whose home is in Panihati, has come with a couple of friends. He asks about Thakur's fractured arm. One of his companions is a doctor.

Thakur is under the care of Dr. Pratap Majumdar. Mani's doctor friend does not approve of his treatment. Thakur says to him, "But Pratap is not a fool. Why do you talk about him this way?"

Just then, Latu[1] exclaims that the medicine bottle has broken.

Hearing about the hatha yogi, Mani (Sen) says, "What is a hatha yogi? 'Hath' [hot] means that it is warm."

Thakur later talks to the devotees about Mani Sen's doctor, "I know him. I told Jadu Mallick that this doctor of his was absolutely useless. He is even less intelligent than the other doctor."

Sri Ramakrishna talks with M. privately

It is not yet evening. Seated on his cot, Thakur is talking with M., who sits facing west on the foot rug near the cot. In the meantime, Mahimacharan is on the semi-circular verandah, facing west and discussing the scriptures loudly with Mani Sen's doctor. Thakur hears this from his seat and says to M. with a little smile, "He is delivering himself. This is rajas. A rajasic person wants to show off his learning and lecture to others. But sattva makes a person introverted, wanting to hide himself. But Mahima is an excellent person. He shows so much enthusiasm and takes such delight in talking about God."

Adhar comes in, salutes Sri Ramakrishna, and sits near M.

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1. Later Swami Adbhutananda.

Adhar Sen, about thirty years old, is a deputy magistrate. His home is in Banetola of Sobhabazar in Calcutta. He has been coming to see Thakur almost daily for quite some time, in the evening after working hard in his office the whole day. However, he hasn't visited Thakur for a few days.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Hello! Why haven't you been here for such a long time?"

Adhar: "I got involved in so much work! I had to attend conferences and school meetings."

Sri Ramakrishna: "So you forgot everything because of school meetings."

Adhar (*humbly*): "Sir, it was all hidden away inside. How is your arm?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Just look, it is not yet healed. I'm taking Pratap's medicine."

After a while, Thakur suddenly says to Adhar, "Look, all this is impermanent – all these meetings, schools, and offices. God is the only reality, and all else is unreal. You must worship Him alone with your whole mind."

Adhar is silent.

"Everything else is transitory – the body now is and then is no more. You mustn't hesitate to call upon Him.[1]

"You don't have to renounce everything. Live in the world like a tortoise. A tortoise moves around, feeding itself in the water, but it keeps its eggs on the dry bank. Its whole mind is where its eggs are.

1. Adhar died just a few months later.

"Captain has developed a beautiful disposition. When he sits down for worship, he looks like a rishi. Besides, he performs the arati with lighted camphor and the hymns and holy text beautifully. When he rises after the worship, his eyes are swollen with emotion, as if ants have been biting them. And he devotes himself to studying sacred texts such as the Gita and the Bhagavata. Once I spoke a couple of English words and he was cross with me. He said, "English-educated people are irreverent."

After a while Adhar says very humbly, "You haven't visited our house for a long time now. It's as if the sitting room smells and there is darkness everywhere."

Hearing these words of the devotee, Thakur's affection rises like a wave in the sea. He stands up suddenly and, full of emotion, blesses Adhar and M., touching their foreheads and hearts. Full of affection, he says, "I look upon you as Narayana. You are indeed my own."

Mahimacharan comes into the room and sits down.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahima*): "What you were saying about men of continence is correct. One cannot hold these spiritual teachings without conserving semen.

"Someone said to Chaitanya Deva, 'You give the devotees so much instruction. Why aren't they able to make much progress?' He replied, 'They squander it all by intercourse with their wives. That's why they're not able to hold on to spiritual

instruction.' If you fill a leaky pail with water, the water trickles out little by little."

Mahima and the other devotees remain silent. After a while Mahimacharan says, "Please pray to God for us, that we may develop that power."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Be careful even now. It is difficult to dam water in the rainy season,[1] and a lot of it has already flowed out. But you can stop it now by raising a dam."

1 Month of Ashada.

Section XIII

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple with Vijay, Kedar, Rakhal, Surendra, and Other Devotees on His Birthday

Chapter I

With Vijay and other devotees in the panchavati on his birthday

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the platform around the old banyan tree in the panchavati with Vijay, Kedar, Surendra, Bhavanath, Rakhal, and many other devotees. He is facing south. Some of the devotees are sitting on the platform; most of them are standing around below it. It is about one o'clock on Sunday, 25 May 1884; 13th of Jaishtha 1291 B.Y., the first day of the bright lunar fortnight.

Thakur's birthday falls on the second day of the bright fortnight in the month of Phalgun but has not yet been celebrated because of the injury to his arm. Now that he is much better, the devotees will celebrate it today. Sahchari, an elderly, well-known kirtan singer, will sing.

Not finding Thakur in his room, M. goes to the panchavati and finds the devotees smiling and enjoying themselves. He does not see Thakur sitting under the tree on the platform though he is standing in front of him. He asks, "Where is he?" Hearing this, everybody laughs loudly. Suddenly seeing Thakur, he awkwardly bows down to pay his respects. He finds Kedar Chatterji and Vijay

Goswami sitting on Thakur's left on the platform. Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to M.*): "See how I have united them?"

Thakur had brought a madhavi creeper from Vrindavan and planted it in the panchavati in 1868. Since then it has grown quite large. Young boys are climbing on it and swinging from it. Thakur looks at them happily and says, "They are like young monkeys. They don't give up even when they fall." Surendra is standing below the platform. Thakur asks him affectionately, "Why don't you come up here? You can dangle your feet from here."

Surendra climbs up and sits down. Seeing Bhavanath dressed in a shirt, Surendra says, "Tell me, are you going to a foreign land?"

Thakur laughs and says, "Our 'foreign land' is God." He talks to the devotees about various things.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Sometimes I used to throw away my dhoti and roam around naked. One day Sambhu said to me, 'I see why you go around naked. It's comfortable. I tried it once myself.'"

Surendra: "When I return from the office and take off my shirt and the long coat I say, 'Divine Mother, how many bonds you have tied me with!'"

Surendra's office – worldly life, the eight bonds, and the three gunas

Sri Ramakrishna: "Eight bonds bind man: shame, hatred, fear, pride of caste, suspicion, and secretiveness are all bonds.[1]

1. The Tantric scriptures list eight bonds or fetters: shame (lajja), hatred or contempt (ghrana), fear (bhaya), pride of caste, rank or

Thakur sings:

This is the grief that weighs on my heart: though You, my Mother, are here and I am wide awake, thieves of passion rob my house.[1]

Then he sings:

In the world's bustling marketplace, O Shyama, You fly kites that soar on the wind of hope, held fast by maya's string.[2]

"'Maya's string' means wife and son. By rubbing the string with the paste of sensuousness, the string has become hard. Sensuousness means 'lust and greed.'

There follows another song:

One comes to this world to play dice. I came with great hopes.

But hope is in itself only a broken state.

First I got the piece marked five, and age after age the twelve, the eighteen, and the sixteen.

Divine Mother, last of all I got the unripe twelve piece, and I got ensnared by the five and six-mark pieces.

Six and two equal eight, six and four make ten. O Divine Mother, I have no control over these.

I won neither honour nor fame in this game, which I have been playing all through the night until dawn.

"The piece marked 'five,' that is the five elements. To get ensnared in the 'fives' and 'sixes' means to fall under the control of the five elements

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race (jati), hesitation or suspicion (shanka), secretiveness (jugupsa), pride of family, ancestry, or lineage (kula), and pride of good conduct, character or piety (shila).

1. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section II, Chapter V.
2. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section II, Chapter V.

and the six passions. To play tricks with the six piece means not to fall under the control of the six enemies. To deceive the 'three' piece means to be beyond the three gunas.

"Sattva, rajas, and tamas, the three qualities of nature, have brought mankind under their control. They are like three brothers: if there is sattva, it can call on rajas; and if there is rajas, it can call on tamas. All three gunas are thieves. Tamas destroys, while rajas binds. Sattva, though it frees from the bonds, cannot take one to God."

Vijay (*smiling*): "Sattva is also a thief, isn't it?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It can't take one to God, but it does show the way to Him."

Bhavanath: "Oh, what wonderful words!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, it is a very lofty thought."

The devotees are very happy hearing these words.

Chapter II

Thakur advises Vijay, Kedar, and others about 'lust and greed'

Sri Ramakrishna: "'Lust and greed' are the cause of bondage. 'Lust and greed' mean worldliness. In fact it is 'lust and greed' that keep one from seeing God."

Saying this, Thakur covers his face with a hand towel and says, "Can you see me now? This is a veil.

When the veil of 'lust and greed' is removed, one attains consciousness-bliss.[1]

"Just see. Whoever has given up the joy of a wife has renounced the joy of the world. God is very near to this person."

Some of the devotees are standing, others are sitting, as they silently listen to these words.

(*To Kedar, Vijay, and others*) "He who has given up the pleasure of women has given up the pleasures of the world. This 'lust and greed' is truly the veil. You show off such big moustaches, and you are still immersed in it. Tell me truly. Search your mind and see if it isn't so."

Vijay: "Sir, it is true."

Kedar remains silent. Thakur continues.

"I see everybody under the control of women. I went to Captain's house. After visiting him, I was to go to Ram's house. So I said to Captain, 'Please give me the carriage fare.' Captain asked his wife. She is like him. She just said, 'What's the matter, what's the matter?' At last Captain said, 'They (Ram and others) will pay for it.' And he has the Gita, the Bhagavata and the Vedanta within him! (*All laugh.*)

"A man puts all his money in the hands of his wife to manage and then says, 'I have such a simple nature that I can't keep two rupees with me.'

"A manager has a number of positions open in his office, but he doesn't appoint a candidate.

1. Chidananda.

Someone said to the applicant, 'Contact Golapi and you will get a job. Golapi is the manager's mistress.'"

His earlier story – visit to the fort – women and the 'sloping path'

"Men don't understand how far down they have gone.

"When I went to the fort in a carriage, I thought we'd come by an ordinary path. Later I found out we'd come down four storeys. It was a sloping path. A person possessed by a ghost doesn't know that he is possessed. He thinks he's quite all right."

Vijay (*smiling*): "If you bring an exorcist, he can get rid of the ghost."

Sri Ramakrishna does not respond to this. He only says, "It is the Lord's will."

He continues to talk about women.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Whoever I ask says that his wife is good. No man has a bad wife. (*All laugh*.)

"Those who live amidst 'lust and greed' aren't able to understand because of their inebriation. Chess players often don't know if a move is right until the game has continued for some time. But onlookers from a distance can see and understand the game better.

"Woman is the embodiment of maya. In his hymn in praise of Rama, Narada said, 'O Rama, all men that are, are parts of you; and all women are parts of Sita, the embodiment of maya. I ask for no other boon: only grant that I may have pure love for

Your lotus feet and that I may not be enchanted by Your world-bewitching maya.'"

Advice to Girindra, Nagendra, and others

Surendra's younger brother, Girindra, and his nephew, Nagendra, and others have arrived. Girindra works in an office; Nagendra is studying law.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girindra*): "I say to you not to get attached to worldly life. You see, Rakhal understands what is knowledge and what is ignorance. He can discriminate between the eternal and the transitory. Now I say to him, 'Go home. You can come here off and on and stay a day or two.'

"Live amicably with one another. Only then will you feel good and be happy. A religious theatrical performance[1] is good and brings joy to the audience when the musicians sing with one voice.

"Keeping most of your mind in God, attend to worldly work with the rest of it.

"A sadhu keeps seventy-five percent of his mind in God and twenty-five percent in worldly work. A sadhu is very alert about words of God. If you step on the tail of a snake, it reacts furiously. It feels more hurt in the tail."

Sahchari sings in the panchavati – suddenly it is cloudy and stormy

Going to the jhautala, Thakur talks about the umbrella to Gopal[2] of Sinthi. Gopal says to M., "He

1. Yatra.
2. Later Swami Advaitananda.

has asked me to put the umbrella in his room." A kirtan has been arranged in the panchavati. When Thakur has come and taken his seat, Sahchari sings. Devotees are gathered, some sitting and others standing.

Yesterday was Saturday, the new moon day[1] of the month of Jaishtha.

Now and then clouds cover the sky. Suddenly a storm arises. Thakur returns to his room with the devotees. It is decided that the kirtan will continue there.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Gopal of Sinthi*): "Tell me, have you brought the umbrella?"

Gopal: "No, sir. I forgot it listening to the music."

The umbrella is lying in the panchavati. Gopal hurriedly goes out to get it.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I am not as absent-minded as that.

"Rakhal gave the date of an invitation as the eleventh, though the actual date was the thirteenth.

"And Gopal – he belongs to a herd of cows. (*All laugh*.)

"You know the story about the goldsmiths. One of them says Keshab, another says Gopal, the third says Hari, and another Hara. The meaning of Gopal is a 'herd of cows.' (*All laugh*.)

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1. Amavasya.

(*Referring to Gopal, Surendra says merrily*) "Where is Krishna?"

Chapter III

Thakur enjoys devotional singing with Vijay and other devotees – Sahchari sings of Gauranga's sannyasa

A woman kirtan singer sings of Gauranga's sannyasa, adding improvisations now and then:

A sannyasin will not look at a woman, for it is against the sannyasin's rule.

The sannyasi, come to remove the sorrows of all created beings, will not look at a woman.

Otherwise, the coming of Gauranga as God's incarnation would be in vain.

Listening to these words of Gauranga's renunciation, Thakur stands up and goes into samadhi. The devotees immediately put garlands around his neck. Bhavanath and Rakhal hold Thakur to keep him from falling. Thakur faces north. Vijay, Kedar, Ram, M., Manomohan, Latu, and other devotees stand in a circle around him.

Is Gauranga himself celebrating a festival of singing the Lord's name with devotees?

Sri Krishna is indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute; He is also the universe and all its creatures; He is finite as well as the all-pervading Spirit in the form of the universe[1]

Thakur is slowly coming out of samadhi. He now talks with Sat-chit-ananda Krishna. Now and then he says the word Krishna, but sometimes is unable

1. Virat.

to pronounce it. He says, "Krishna, Krishna, Krishna. Sat-chit-ananda." I can't see Your form these days. Now I see You both within and without. You are the living beings, the universe, the twenty-four cosmic principles. You are everything. You are the mind, the intellect, everything. The salutation hymn to the Guru says:

> Salutations to the Guru who makes it possible to realize Him who pervades this entire universe of the moving and the unmoving.[1]

"You are indivisible. Yet You pervade this entire universe of the moving and the unmoving. You are the container and also the contained. Krishna is life, Krishna is mind, Krishna is intellect, and Krishna is the Self. O Govinda, my life breath, my life."

Vijay is also in an ecstatic mood. Thakur says to him, "What, dear sir, have you too become unconscious?"

Vijay (*humbly*): "No, sir."

The singer continues, singing "The intense love for God that makes one blind!" As soon as she adds an improvised line, "O friend of my life, I keep You within my heart," Thakur again goes into samadhi. His injured arm rests on Bhavanath's shoulder.

When Sri Ramakrishna returns a little to normal consciousness, the singer adds another improvised line, "Why so much pain for one who has renounced everything for You?"

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1. Vishveshvara Tantra 2.

Thakur salutes her. He is seated while he listens to the music and occasionally goes into ecstasy. Now the musician stops singing, and Thakur speaks.

Forgetting the body and the world in ecstatic love – Thakur dances with the devotees and goes into samadhi

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay and other devotees*): "What is ecstatic love?[1] He who has developed intense love for God, like Chaitanya, forgets the world. He also forgets the body, which is so dear to all."

What happens when one has ecstatic love for God is explained by Thakur through a song:

> When will dawn that day when tears stream from my eyes as I repeat Lord Hari's name?
>
> When will dawn that day when worldly desires disappear from my heart?
>
> When will dawn that day when my body thrills and my hair stands on end?
>
> When will dawn that day?

Thakur now stands up and begins to dance. The devotees dance with him. Thakur pulls M. by the arm and makes him join the dancing group.

Sri Ramakrishna again goes into samadhi, while dancing. He then stands motionless like a picture. Kedar sings a hymn to break his samadhi:

> I bow to Brahman-Consciousness, the primal seed of the universe, abiding in the lotus of the heart,

1. Prema, intense love for God.

Who, without attributes, rests in undifferentiated repose, known only to Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh,

Who is attained only by yogis in the depth of meditation,

Who removes the fear of life and death and is the essence of Knowledge and Truth.

Gradually the samadhi breaks. Thakur sits down and chants: "Om Sat-chit-ananda! Govinda! Govinda! Govinda! Yogamaya! Scripture, devotee, and God in one."[1]

Thakur takes the dust of the place where the kirtan was sung and the devotees danced.

Chapter IV

The difficult vow of the sannyasin – sannyasins and instruction to mankind

Thakur is sitting on the semicircular verandah overlooking the Ganges. Vijay, Bhavanath, M., Kedar, and other devotees are with him. Now and then he repeats, "Ah, Krishna Chaitanya."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay and other devotees*): "The Lord's name has been chanted so much in this room; devotional songs have been sung with so much zest."

Bhavanath: "And there have been talks on renunciation."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah, what feeling!" He begins to sing:

Gaur is dispensing the nectar of love, pouring out pitcher after pitcher of divine ecstasy, love never ceasing.

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1. Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan.

The sweet Nitai summons them all; the beloved Gaur, too, bids them come.

Shantipur[1] is near drowning, flooded with love!

(*To Vijay and others*): "The song says this beautifully: the sannyasin must not look at a woman, for this is his rule. What a high ideal!"

Vijay: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Others learn from a sannyasin's example. That's why there is such a strict rule of conduct. A sannyasin should not even look at a picture of a woman. Such a strict rule!

"A black goat is sacrificed as an offering to the Divine Mother. But if it has the slightest blemish, it is rejected. The sannyasin, of course, must not have intercourse with women, but he must not even talk to them."

Vijay: "The younger Haridas spoke to a woman devotee. Chaitanya Deva gave him up."

His earlier story – Marwari's offering of money to Sri Ramakrishna and Mathur's offering him a piece of land

Sri Ramakrishna: "'Lust and greed' for a sannyasin is like the odour of a goat in the body of a beautiful woman. Her beauty is useless if she smells like that.

"A Marwari wanted to put some money in my name. Mathur also wanted to transfer some land to my name. I could accept neither.

"The rules of conduct for a sannyasin are very difficult indeed. When one puts on the guise of a

1. A town in Nadia District.

sannyasin or sadhu, one has to conduct himself exactly like a sadhu or a sannyasin. It's like in the theatre: the person who plays the king acts like a king, and the one who takes the role of his minister acts just like a minister.

"Once an impersonator was acting like a sannyasin who had renounced. Gentlemen offered him a small bag of money, but he said no and went away. He didn't even touch the money. But a little later, he came back, washed and dressed in his own clothes. Then he said, 'Let me have what you were offering me.' When he dressed like a sadhu, he couldn't touch money. Now he would accept even four annas.

"But in the state of a paramahamsa one becomes like a child. A five-year-old does not distinguish between a man and a woman. Even so, the paramahamsa has to be careful to set a good example."

Why was Keshab Sen not able to teach people?

Keshab Sen was associated with 'lust and greed.' It hindered his teaching of humanity. That is what Thakur is saying.

Sri Ramakrishna: "He (Keshab) – do you understand?"

Vijay: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He (Keshab Sen) tried to take care of both the worldly and the spiritual. So he couldn't achieve very much."

Why did Chaitanya Deva renounce the world?

Vijay: "Chaitanya Deva said to Nityananda, 'Nitai, if I hadn't renounced the world, people would not be helped. They would all want to live a worldly life. Nobody would try to give his whole mind to the lotus feet of God by renouncing 'lust and greed.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Chaitanya Deva renounced the world to set an example.

"A sadhu renounces 'lust and greed' for his own good. And then even when he has become detached, he must not allow a woman or gold near him, to set an example. A man of renunciation, the sannyasin, is a world teacher. Just seeing him gives spiritual awakening."

It is almost evening. The devotees are gradually leaving, after offering their salutations. Vijay says to Kedar, "This morning while I was meditating, I saw you. I wanted to touch your body but I found no body there."

Section XIV

Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple with Surendra, Bhavanath, Rakhal, Latu, M., Adhar, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Character of Baburam, Rakhal, Latu, Niranjan, Narendra, and others

It is evening. Sri Ramakrishna is seated in his room with the devotees at the Dakshineswar temple, chanting the name of the Mother of the Universe and meditating on Her. Rakhal, Adhar, M., and couple of other devotees are there.

It is Friday, 20 June 1884, the twelfth day of the dark fortnight of Jaishtha. The Car Festival will begin in five days.

After some time the arati begins in the various temples and Adhar goes to watch. For Mani's education, Thakur is talking happily with him about the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, does Baburam want to continue his studies? I said to him, 'Continue your studies to set an example.' After Sita was set free, Bibhishana refused to accept the throne. Rama said, 'You must become king for the benefit of the ignorant. Otherwise, they will say, "Bibhishana served Rama, but what did he gain?" They will be happy to see that you have gained the kingdom.'

"The other day I saw that Baburam, Bhavanath, and Harish have a feminine nature.

"I saw Baburam as a goddess, with a necklace around his neck and female companions with him. He has received something in a dream. His body is pure. He'll have to do only a little, and he will succeed.

"You know what's happening? I'm finding it difficult to take care of my body. It would be good if he would come and live here. The nature of these boys is changing. Noto (Latu) remains on a high plane of spiritual emotion. Gradually he's going to merge with God.

"Rakhal is developing such a nature that I myself have to serve him. He isn't of much service to me.

"Where are any other youngsters like Baburam and Niranjan?[1] I feel that if others come, they'll just get instruction and leave.

"But I don't force Baburam to come here; it could create problems at home. (*Smiling*) When I say, 'Why don't you come,' he has a nice reply, 'Why don't you make me come?' When he sees Rakhal, he weeps, saying he is so happy here.

"Rakhal lives here now like a son of the house. I know he won't be attached to the world now. He says, 'All those things appear so tasteless to me.' His wife came here. She's fourteen years old. From here she went to Konnagar. They asked him to go

1. Later Swami Niranjanananda.

too, but he didn't. He said, 'I don't enjoy such fun and frolic.'

"How does Niranjan appear to you?"

M.: "He is handsome."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, not just his face. He's also simple and guileless. One can easily realize God if he is guileless. Spiritual instructions work faster in a guileless heart. It is like a well-tilled field without stones or pebbles. The moment a seed falls on the ground, it germinates. And it quickly bears fruit.

"Niranjan won't marry. Don't you think it is 'lust and greed' that bind a person?"

M.: "Sir, they do."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What use is it to give up tobacco and betel leaf? Giving up 'lust and greed' is the real renunciation.

"I saw in a vision that, though he worked in an office, he would not be touched by it. He works for his mother's sake. There's no harm in that.

"A clerk is jailed. He is bound, chained, and later set free. Will he dance with gusto after being released? No, he again takes to clerkship. You don't wish to have a paid job, but you have to provide for your family. If you didn't, what would happen to them?"

Mani: "I can leave if someone takes responsibility for them."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, that's true. But for now do both this and that, the worldly and also the spiritual."

Mani: "It takes great luck to be able to renounce everything."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That is certainly true. But it depends on inborn tendencies.[1] A little work still remains in your case. When you have completed that, you will feel peace. You will be released. A patient is not easily discharged once he has entered a hospital – only when he is cured.

"Two classes of devotees come here. One class says, 'O Lord, please save me!' The other class, who belong to the inner circle, don't say this. They will succeed by only knowing two things, 'One, who I am,[2] and then who they are – that is, what their relationship with me is.'

"You belong to the latter class. Otherwise, how could you do so much –"

Narendra, Rakhal, and Niranjan have masculine natures[3] – Baburam and Bhavanath have feminine natures[4]

"Bhavanath and Baburam have feminine natures. Harish wears a woman's cloth when he goes to bed. Baburam says, 'I like that attitude.' That is why they've met each other. Bhavanath also has that attitude. On the other hand, Narendra, Rakhal, and Niranjan have masculine natures.

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1. Samskaras.
2. Referring to himself.
3. Purusha bhava.
4. Prakriti bhava.

Significance of the broken arm – Sri Ramakrishna and occult powers

"Well, what does breaking my arm mean? Once before I broke a tooth in a state of ecstasy. This time it was my arm."

Seeing that Mani is silent, Thakur himself answers.

"My arm broke to rid me completely of my I-ness. I can no longer find 'I' within me. Looking for I, I find only Him. Until one is completely rid of I-ness, it is not possible to attain Him.

"Look at the chatak bird. It lives on land, but see how high it flies!

"Captain says I haven't gained occult powers because I eat fish.

"Sometimes I tremble at the thought that I might attain such powers. If I had them, this place would have turned into a hospital. People would be coming here begging, 'Please cure us.' Are occult powers good?"

M.: "No, sir. You yourself have said that if one possesses even one of the eight occult powers, it is impossible to realize God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You are right. Only people of low intelligence want occult powers.

"If you ask a favour of a rich man, he no longer respects you. He doesn't allow you to ride in the same carriage with him. And even if he does, he doesn't let you sit near him. So the best is selfless

love for God[1] that rises unbidden out of the depths of the soul.[2]"

God without form is true, and so is God with form – the home of a devotee is Thakur's meeting place

"Well, what do you say, are God without form and God with form both true? One can't fix the mind on the formless God for long. So God assumes form for the devotee.

"Captain said something beautiful, 'A bird flies very high. But when it gets tired, it comes to the branch of a tree to rest. God with form after God without form.'

"I'll have to visit your home once. I saw in a vision that Adhar's house, Surendra's house, and Balaram's house are all meeting places for the devotees.

"But I'm neither happy nor sad if they don't come here."

Merriment with devotees is the magic of magician – Chandi – grace of God

M.: "Sir, why should that not happen? Whoever feels happiness also feels sorrow. You are beyond both happiness and sorrow."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. And I see it all as a magician and his magic. Only the magician is real; all his magic is ephemeral, like a dream.

"I realized this when I listened to a recitation of the Chandi. First I heard that the demons

1. Nishkama bhakti.
2. Ahetuki bhakti.

Shumbha and Nishumbha were born, and shortly after I heard that they were dead."

M.: "Sir, once I was going with Gangadhar to Kalna, by steamboat. The steamboat collided with another boat carrying twenty or twenty-five passengers. It sank, along with all the people. It all disappeared like the foam churned up by a steamer's waves.

"Tell me, does a person watching a play have compassion for others? Does he feel any responsibility? Without some feeling of doership, compassion is not possible, is it?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He sees all these things at the same time: God, maya, living beings, and the universe.[1]

"He sees that maya (vidyamaya and avidyamaya), living beings, and the universe exist, and yet do not exist. As long as one is conscious of 'I,' he is conscious of others. But once it is cut through with the sword of spiritual knowledge, nothing at all exists. Then even the 'I' becomes the magic of the magician."

Mani contemplates this. Sri Ramakrishna says, "You know what it's like? It's like cutting through a flower's twenty-five layers of petals in one stroke."

"Feeling you are the doer! Rama! Rama![2] Sukadeva and Shankaracharya kept their ego of knowledge. It is not man's compassion; that belongs

1. Ishvara, maya, jiva, and jagat.
2. *Rama! Rama!* means "good heavens!"

to God. Compassion is the ego of knowledge – and He Himself has become the 'I of knowledge.'"

Very secret talk – Kali and Brahman – jurisdiction of Primal Power, Kalki avatar

"You may watch a thousand tricks of magic, yet everything is under God. You cannot escape. You are not independent. Indeed, you have to do what He makes you do. One attains the knowledge of Brahman only when His Primal Power dispenses it. Then you can witness the play of the magician. Otherwise not.

"As long as you have even a little consciousness of 'I,' you are under the jurisdiction of the Primal Power – and unable to set yourself free.

"The play of an incarnation of God is the play of the Primal Power. It is by Her power that the avatar incarnates as a human being. Thus alone does an incarnation work; it is all by the power of the Divine Mother.

"Whenever someone would ask for money from the former treasurer of the Kali Temple, he would say, 'Come back in two or three days. Let me ask the proprietor.'

"At the end of the Kaliyuga, God will incarnate Himself as Kalki[1] – a brahmin's son who knows nothing. But suddenly he will be given a horse and a sword."

1. The tenth and last incarnation of Vishnu, who is yet to come.

Keshab Sen's mother and sister – Bhuvanmohini, the wet-nurse

Adhar returns from the arati. Bhuvanmohini, a wet-nurse, sometimes comes to see Thakur. He cannot eat the food brought by everyone.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Adhar and others*): "Bhuvan came to see me. She brought twenty-five Bombay mangoes, sandesh, and rasagollas. She asked me if I would eat a mango. I said, 'My stomach is heavy today.' And truly today my stomach is uncomfortable after eating only a little kichuri and sandesh.

"Keshab Sen's mother and sister came here. So I danced a little. What else could I do? I had to entertain them. They have suffered great bereavement."

Section XV

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Balaram's House on the Day of the Return Car Festival[1]

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna and the harmony of religions

Sri Ramakrishna is a picture of bliss, sitting with an assembly of devotees in Balaram's parlour, talking with them.

Today is the day of the Return Car Festival, Thursday, 3 July 1884, the tenth day of the bright fortnight of Ashada. Balaram maintains a shrine for Sri Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe, in his home, where he performs daily worship. He also has a small cart. That is why he has invited Thakur on the occasion of the Return Car Festival. The small cart will be drawn on the second storey quadrangular verandah of the outer house. On 25 June, last Wednesday, the day of the Car Festival, Sri Ramakrishna had been invited to the home of Ishan Mukherji[2] in Thanthania. That same evening, at the home of Bhudhar on College Street, he had met pundit Shashadhar for the first time. Three days ago, last Monday, Shashadhar had met him for a second time at the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar.[3]

At Thakur's behest, Balaram has invited Shashadhar to his house today. The pundit explains Hindu

1. Ratha yatra.
2. See *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita,* Volume I, Section XI.
3. See *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita,* Volume III, Section IX.

religious ideas to people. Is this why Sri Ramakrishna is so eager to transmit power to him?

Thakur is talking with the devotees. Sitting close to him are Ram, M., Balaram, Manomohan, some young devotees, and Balaram's father. Balaram's father is an extremely devout Vaishnava who lives most of the time alone in Vrindavan in a garden house he built himself. There he supervises the worship of Krishna.[1] He spends all his time in Vrindavan in the service of the deity. Sometimes he studies devotional literature like *Chaitanya Charitamrita*. Other times he takes a devotional book and copies it. Yet at other times he sits and makes garlands of roses or invites Vaishnavas and serves them. Balaram has written his father a number of letters, inviting him to Calcutta to visit Thakur. The topic of conversation that Thakur is having with the devotees is that all religions have something sectarian in them, particularly the Vaishnavas – people of different sects fight among themselves and don't know how to harmonize.

Thakur talks about religious harmony with Balaram – the Bhaktamala, the Bhagavata – his earlier story – fanaticism of Vaishnavcharan and denouncing Shaktas before Mathur

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Balaram's father and other devotees*): "One holy book of the Vaishnavas is the Bhaktamala. It is a beautiful book. It contains nothing but stories about devotees. But it is one-sided. It goes so far in one place as to make the Divine Mother[2] adopt a Vishnu mantra.

"Once I praised Vaishnavcharan a lot and asked Mathur Babu to invite him to his house. Mathur was very hospitable to him – silver plates for the

1. Shyamasundara.
2. Bhagavati.

refreshments. And what did Vaishnavcharan say to Mathur Babu but that without a Krishna mantra nothing would help! Now Mathur Babu is a devout worshiper of the Divine Mother of the Universe. His face reddened. I nudged Vaishnavcharan.

"I think you can find such things in the Srimad Bhagavata also. Such as that without a Krishna mantra it is as difficult to cross the ocean of the world as it is to try to cross a mighty ocean by holding a dog's tail. All sects talk highly of their own sects alone.

"Shaktas also try to disparage Vaishnavas when they say, 'Sri Krishna is the pilot of the river of the world; he alone can take one across.' To this Shaktas reply, 'Of course this is true. Will the supreme Mother, empress of the universe,[1] row one across Herself? She has engaged this Krishna to do the job.'" (*All laugh*.)

His earlier story – Thakur's visit to his birthplace in 1880[2] – arrogance of Vaishnava weavers of Phului Shyambazar – Thakur's advice on harmony

"What arrogance people show because of their beliefs! There are weavers in my village and in Shyambazar and other places, most of them Vaishnavas. They talk very big. They say, 'Which Vishnu do they worship? The Vishnu who preserves! We don't touch him.' Or 'Which Shiva?

1. Rajarajeshvari.
2. Sri Ramakrishna visited his birthplace for the last time in 1880. During this journey he, together with Hriday, paid a gracious visit to Phului Shyambazar and performed kirtan there with the devotees Natwar Goswami, Ishan Mallick, Saday Babaji, and others.

We accept Atmarama Shiva, the Atmarameshwar Shiva.' One of them says, 'Tell me which Hari you worship.' Thereupon another says, 'No, why should we? Let someone else answer.' They work at weaving and talk so big."

Dogmatism of Rati's mother, the attendant of Rani Katyayani

"Rati's mother – the attendant of Rani Katyayani, a member of Vaishnavcharan's group – was a bigoted Vaishnava. She used to visit here frequently. Her devotion for God was unusual. But as soon as she saw me eating Mother Kali's prasad she ran away.

"He alone is a real person who has harmonized. Most people are single-minded. But I see all these as one. Shaktas, Vaishnavas, and Vedantists worship the same one Reality. He who is formless also has forms. All are only His different forms.

> Brahman without attributes is my father, and God with form is my mother.
>
> Whom shall I blame? Whom shall I worship? The pans of the scale are of equal weight.

"The Tantra also speaks of the same Being as the Vedas. The Puranas also speak of the same Being – Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. The Absolute belongs to the same as the phenomenal belongs.

"The Veda says, 'Om Sat-chit-ananda Brahman.' The Tantra says, 'Om Sat-chit-ananda Shiva – Shiva only, only Shiva.' The Purana says, 'Om Sat-chit-ananda Krishna.' The Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras talk of the same Sat-chit-ananda. And

the Vaishnava scriptures also say that Krishna Himself has become Kali."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna in the state of a paramahamsa – like a child and like a madman

Thakur goes to the verandah for a while and then returns to his room. As he was going out, he was saluted by Vishwambar's daughter, who is six or seven years old. When he returns to his room, she talks to him. She is with some boys and girls her own age.

Vishwambar's daughter (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "I saluted you, but you didn't pay any attention."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What? I didn't notice."

The girl: "Then wait. Let me salute you again. Please stop. I want to salute your other foot too."

Thakur sits down laughing and, bending his head to the ground, salutes the girl. He asks her to sing a song, but she replies, "I swear, I do not know how to sing." When Thakur insists again, she says, "Should one be pressed after swearing?" Thakur enjoys the little girl's company and sings a song to her. First he sings a light song, and then he sings:

> Come, let me braid your hair. What will your husband say when he visits you?

The children and the devotees laugh when they hear the song.

Thakur's earlier story – visit to his birth place – character of the child Shivaram[1] – Durga Puja at Hriday's house in Sihore – Thakur worships his own phallus in a state of divine intoxication

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "The nature of a paramahamsa is just like that of a five year old child. He sees everything full of consciousness.

"Once when I was in the countryside (in Kamarpukur), Ramlal's brother, Shivaram, was four or five years old. He was chasing a grasshopper on the bank of a pond. The leaves were moving. Lest they rustle, he said to them, 'Hush! I want to catch a grasshopper.' One day during a windstorm with torrential rain and flashes of lighting, he would try to open the door and go out. When I scolded him he didn't go out, but he kept peeping out at the flashes of lighting and saying, 'Uncle, they're striking flints again!'

"A paramahamsa is like a child. He doesn't see the difference between a relative and a stranger. He doesn't have ties of worldly relationships. One day he[2] asked me, 'Are you my father's younger brother,[3] or the husband of my father's sister?'[4]

"Like a child, a paramahamsa isn't aware of his whereabouts. He sees everything as Brahman. He doesn't know where he is going or on what path he is proceeding. Ramlal's brother (Shivaram) went to

1. Ramakrishna's nephew, Ramlal's younger brother. He was born on 30 March 1866, 18th Chaitra, 1272 (B.Y.), the full moon day of Holi. Thakur visited his birthplace when he was three or four years old, in 1869-70.
2. Referring to Shivaram, Ramlal's younger brother.
3. Chacha.
4. Phupha.

Hriday's house to see the Durga Puja. From Hriday's house he wandered away all by himself. Seeing a four-year old child, a passer-by asked him, 'Where have you come from?' He couldn't say. He only said, 'Hut.' That is to say, from a house where the worship of the image was being performed. When he was questioned further, 'From which home did you come?' he could only say, 'Elder brother.'

"And then sometimes a paramahamsa gets into a state of divine madness. When I was in that state, I would worship my own phallus as the Shiva lingam. It was worship of the living lingam. I would fasten a pearl around it! I can't do that now."

Sri Ramakrishna meets a madman of perfect knowledge after the dedication of Dakshineswar temple in 1855

"A little while after the dedication of the Dakshineswar Temple a mad fellow came. He was a man of perfect knowledge.[1] His shoes were torn and he was holding a potted mango sapling. After a dip in the Ganges, he performed no worship or devotions but ate whatever he had tied in the corner of his cloth. Next he went to the Kali Temple and began to chant holy verses of praise. The temple reverberated with them. Haladhari was in the shrine at the time. The madman wasn't given food to eat at the guest-house, but it didn't upset him. He gathered up the discarded leaf plates and ate the remnants of food on them. This was where the dogs came to eat. He pushed away the dogs and

1. Purna jnani.

helped himself to the food. The dogs didn't seem to mind. Haladhari followed him and asked who he was and if he was a man of perfect knowledge. His reply was, 'Yes, I am a perfect jnani. Now keep quiet!'

"When I heard all this from Haladhari my heart trembled in my chest. I held tightly to Hriday. I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother! Will I also be put in this state?' We went to see him. He spoke words of wisdom, but when others came, he acted crazy. When he left, Haladhari accompanied him for quite some distance. When they passed the gate, he said to Haladhari, 'What more can I tell you? When you see no difference between the water in this gutter and the water in the Ganges, know that you have reached perfect knowledge.' Saying this, he walked away quickly."

Chapter III

Practicing spiritual disciplines is more essential than learning

With the devotees seated close by, Sri Ramakrishna is talking with M.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "What do you think of Shashadhar?"

M.: "Sir, he is a good man."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He's intelligent, isn't he?"

M.: "Yes, Sir. He's a real scholar."

Sri Ramakrishna: "According to the Gita, one who is respected and accepted by many has the

power of God within. But there's a little work he has yet to do.

"What use is mere scholarship? Some austerity is necessary. One has to practice some spiritual disciplines."

His earlier story – spiritual practices of Pundit Gauri and Narayan Shastri – meeting with Keshab at the Belgharia garden in 1875 – arrival of Captain in 1876-77

"Gauri Pundit practiced spiritual disciplines. When he chanted a hymn to the Divine Mother,[1] scholars would seem to be no more than earthworms.

"Narayan Shastri also was not just a pundit; he also practiced spiritual disciplines.

"Narayan Shastri studied continuously for twenty-five years. For seven years he studied the Nyaya system of philosophy. Even then he would go into ecstasy repeating, 'Hara, Hara.' The king of Jaipur wanted to make him his court pundit, but he didn't accept the position. He often came and stayed at Dakshineswar. He had a great desire to go to the Vasishtha Ashrama to practice austerities. He would often tell me about wanting to go there. I forbade him. He said, 'Who knows when I may die? When will I perform spiritual practices? The pot may crack at any time.' When he persisted, I let him go.

"I hear from some that Narayan Shastri has quit his body. Perhaps he received a slap from Bhairava while practicing austerities. And there

1. Ho re re niralamba lambodara.

are others who say, 'He is alive. We have just seen him off in a train.'

"Before meeting Keshab Sen, I asked Narayan Shastri, 'Please go once and see what kind of person he is.' After visiting Keshab, he returned and said, 'That fellow is perfect in japa.' He knew astrology and said, 'Keshab Sen has a good destiny. I spoke to him in Sanskrit and he talked in Bengali.'

"Then I went with Hriday and met him in the Belgharia garden house. As soon I saw him, I said, 'He has cast off his tail. He can now live in water as well as on dry land.'

"Keshab sent three Brahmos to the temple to examine me. Prasanna was one of them. They were to watch me day and night and then report to Keshab. They were with me at night in my room. They constantly repeated, 'Compassionate One' and said to me, 'You should follow Keshab Babu. It will benefit you.' I told them, 'I believe in God with form.' Even then they kept on repeating, 'Compassionate One, Compassionate One!' Then a mood came over me. I said, 'Leave this place.' I didn't let them stay in my room at all. They went out and slept on the verandah.

"When Captain saw me for the first time, he also stayed the night."

Michael Madhusudana[1] and conversation with Narayan Shastri

"Michael visited here when Narayan Shastri was present. Dwarika Babu, Mathur's eldest son, had brought him. A lawsuit was in the offing with the owners of the magazine[2] next door so the proprietors of the temple had brought Michael to the garden to seek his advice.

"There is a big room next to the [temple] office. I saw Michael there. I asked Narayan Shastri to talk to him. Michael couldn't speak well in Sanskrit and kept making mistakes. So they talked in the vernacular (Bengali).

"Narayan Shastri asked, 'Why did you give up your religion?' Pointing to his belly, Michael said, 'I had to give up because of this.'

"Narayan Shastri said, 'What conversation can I have with one who gives up his faith for the sake of the stomach?' Madhusudana then said to me, 'Please tell me something.'

"I said, 'I don't know why, but I don't feel like saying anything. It is like somebody is shutting my mouth.'"

'Lust and greed' can deprive a pundit of his intelligence – worship and rituals of a worldly person

Choudhury Babu was expected to pay a visit to Thakur.

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1. Madhusudan 1824-1873: A poet born at Sagardari who lived in England from 1862 to 1867 and was a convert to Christianity. He met Thakur sometime after 1868.
2. Ordnance storehouse.

Manomohan: "Choudhury won't be coming. He said he was expecting a Bengali (Shashadhar) from Faridpur, so had dropped the idea of coming."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How mean! He has the arrogance of learning. On top of that, he has married a second time. He considers the world an insignificant earthen bowl."

Choudhury holds an M.A. He developed great dispassion on the death of his first wife, when he would visit Thakur often at Dakshineswar. He has married a second time and is now earning three to four hundred rupees a month.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Attachment to 'lust and greed' robs a person of understanding. When Haramohan came to see me for the first time, he had good signs. I would long to see him. He must have been seventeen or eighteen then. These days when I invite him, he doesn't turn up. He is living in a separate house now with his wife. He used to live with his maternal uncle and was fine. He had no problems of running a household then. Now, having established a new home, he has to go daily to the market for his wife. (*All laugh*.) The other day he came to Dakshineswar. I said to him, 'Go away. Leave this place. I don't feel like touching you.'"

Kartabhaja Chandra (Chatterji) has arrived. He is sixty or sixty-five years old. He recites verses of the Kartabhaja sect quite fluently. He goes to gently stroke Thakur's feet, but Thakur doesn't let him touch his feet. He says laughingly, "Now you are acting prudently."

Sri Ramakrishna goes to Balaram's inner apartments to see Lord Jagannath. The women of the family are anxious to see him in their quarters.

Now Thakur returns to the parlour, smiling. He says, "I changed my clothes that I used in the toilet and then went for the darshan of Jagannath. I offered some flowers.

"The worship, japa, and austerities of worldly people are only for the moment. Those who know nothing but God repeat His name with every breath. Some unceasingly chant the name of Rama, or Om Rama mentally. People who follow the path of knowledge also repeat 'So 'ham' (I am He). The tongues of some people are always moving.

"Indeed there must be constant remembrance and contemplation of God."

Chapter IV

Balaram's house – Shashadhar and other devotees – Thakur in samadhi

Shashadhar enters the room with one or two friends. They salute Thakur and sit down.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Like friends of the bride, after arranging the bridal bed, we are awake and awaiting the bridegroom's arrival."

The pundit laughs. The devotees have gathered together. Balaram's father is there, as well as Dr. Pratap. Thakur talks about various things.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shashadhar*): "There are signs of spiritual knowledge. The first is a serene

nature. The second is absence of pride. You have both these signs.

"There are other signs in a man of knowledge, too. In the company of a sadhu, he is a man of renunciation; when at work, he's like a lion – for example, while lecturing. He's full of humour in the company of his wife, witty as a pundit. (*The pundit and others laugh.*)

"The vijnani has a different disposition. For example, Chaitanya Deva acted like a child, or like a madman, or an inert object, or a ghoul.

"There are, again, in the state of a child, adolescent as well as youthful moods. In the state of an adolescent, he is full of fun, but when he teaches others, he has the strength of a young man."

Pundit: "What kind of love is necessary to realize God?"

Shashadhar and talk on the principles of love and devotion – burning faith is needed – humility of the Vaishnavas

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are three kinds of bhakti, depending on one's nature: the sattva of bhakti, the rajas of bhakti and the tamas of bhakti.

"In sattvic bhakti, only God knows about it. Such a devotee loves God secretly, perhaps meditating under his mosquito net without anyone knowing about it. When one develops the purest sattva,[1] – sattva of sattva – the vision of God is very near, just as at dawn one knows that there will be no more delay for the sun to rise.

1. Vishuddha sattva.

"Those who have rajasic bhakti have a desire for people to see that they are devotees. They perform the worship with sixteen items. They go into the temple wearing pure silk. They wear a rudraksha rosary round their necks. The rosary has pearls and here and there gold rudrakshas.

"The tamas of bhakti is devotion like an attack of dacoits. Dacoits are armed with weapons while committing dacoity and have no fear even of eight police officers. They shout, 'Kill, rob!' Like mad people they shout, 'Hara, Hara, Hara; Vyom, Vyom! Victory to Kali!' They have immense strength of mind, and burning faith.

"Shaktas have this kind of faith. 'Why, I have once chanted the name of Kali, the name of Durga. I have once chanted the name of Rama. How can I be touched by sin?'

"Vaishnavas have a very meek and humble disposition. They only tell the rosary (*Thakur looks at Balaram's father*) and weep and sob, 'O Krishna, Be merciful to me! I am pitiable, I am a sinner.'

"One should have such burning faith as to be able to say, 'I have taken God's name, how can there be any sin in me?' Imagine a person repeating the name of God day and night, yet calling himself a sinner!

"While talking, Thakur becomes intoxicated with ecstatic love and sings:

> Mother, can I but die with Durga's name upon my lips,
>
> I shall see, O Shankari, how in the end you cannot refuse to rescue me.

Should I have killed a brahmin or a cow, or destroyed a child in the womb, or indulged in drink, or slain a woman,

For all those heinous deeds I care not in the least; still may I aspire to Brahman.

Shashadhar begins to weep listening to the song. Thakur sings another song:

In Shiva's company the Mother is ever lost in ecstasy;

Though drunk with the wine of bliss, She reels but does not fall.[1]

Now Vaishnavcharan, Adhar's professional musician, sings:

O my tongue, always repeat the name of Durga.

Who else can save you from danger but She?

O Mother, You are the heaven, the earth, and the nether world.

From You have sprung Hari, Brahma, and the twelve Gopalas.

You are the ten great Powers,[2] and the ten Incarnations.[3]

This time You must take me across!

You are the moving and the unmoving, the gross and the subtle.

You are creation, preservation, and dissolution;

You are the source of the universe.

You are the Mother of the three worlds and their saviour.

You are the Power of all and You are Your own Power too.[4]

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1. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section XIV, Chapter III.
2. The ten Mahavidyas, or aspects of Shakti, personified as Kali, Tara, Tripurasundari, Bhuvanesvari, Chinnamasta, Bhairavi, Dhumavati, Bagalamukhi, Matangi, and Kamala.
3. The ten incarnations of Vishnu.
4. For complete song refer to Volume II, Section XVIII, Chapter II.

Hearing these few lines of song, Thakur goes into ecstasy. When the song ends, he himself begins to sing:

O Mother Shyama! Yashoda would make You dance when she called You her precious blue jewel!

Where have You hidden that form, O terrible Shyama?

Vaishnavcharan now sings devotional songs about the meeting with Subol.[1]

When the musician adds his own line, 'I say, one cannot pronounce Dha without Ra,' Thakur goes into samadhi.[2]

Shashadhar sheds tears of love.

Chapter V

The Return Car Festival – Thakur and the devotees sing devotional songs and dance in front of the chariot

Thakur comes out of samadhi. The song is over. Shashadhar, Pratap, Ramdayal, Ram, Manomohan, some young boy devotees, and others are also present. Sri Ramakrishna says to M., "Please poke him." That is, he wants someone to ask something of Shashadhar.

Ramdayal (*to Shashadhar*): "The scriptures speak of the form of Brahman as an imagination. Who does the imagining?"

Pundit: "Brahman Himself. It is not the imaginings of a human being."

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1. Subol Milan, one of Krishna's companions.
2. *Dha* and *Ra* are the reversal of *Radha*, to whom the songs of Subol relate.

Dr. Pratap: "But why? Why does Brahman imagine?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why not? He doesn't consult anybody before He does anything. It is His pleasure. He is self-willed.[1] Why should we care to know the reason why God does it? You've come to the orchard to eat mangoes, so eat them. If you begin to count the trees, how many thousands of branches and how many hundreds of thousands of leaves – what use are all these calculations? Futile reasoning and discussions do not yield the truth."

Dr. Pratap: "So should we not reason anymore?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You must not argue or reason for no purpose. However, you must reason about what is Real and what is unreal, what is permanent and what is impermanent. You must reason in times of passion, anger, or grief."

Pundit: "That's different. It's called reasoning by discrimination."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, discriminating between what is Real and what is unreal." (*All are silent*.)

(*To the Pundit*) "Formerly, great men used to visit."

Pundit: "Do you mean rich people?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, great scholars."

Meanwhile the little chariot is brought to the outer verandah of the second storey. Lord Jagannath, Subhadra, and Balaram are adorned with flowers and garlands of different kinds. They

1. Icchamaya.

are also bedecked with jewelry and clad in new yellow apparel. Balaram worships in the sattvic way, without any pomp or show. People outside don't even know that the Car Festival is being celebrated in the house.

Thakur and the devotees go to the front of the cart. It will be pulled down this very verandah. Holding the string of the cart, Thakur pulls it for a while and then begins to sing:

> Behold, the whole of Nadia trembles under the waves of Gauranga's love!

Again he sings:

> Behold, the brothers have come! The two who shed tears while chanting Hari's name.[1]

Sri Ramakrishna dances, and the devotees dance with him, singing. Vaishnavcharan, the musician, joins the group in dance and music.

In no time the verandah is filled with people. The women view this ecstatic celebration from a nearby room. It looks as if Sri Gauranga Himself, intoxicated with the love of Hari, is dancing in Srivas's home with his devotees. The pundit and his friends also watch the song and dance in front of the chariot.

It is not yet evening. Thakur returns to the sitting room and sits down with the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the pundit*): "This is called the joy of devotional song.[2] Worldly people are

1. For the complete song refer to Section VI, Chapter I.
2. Bhajanananda.

engrossed in the joy of the senses,[1] the joy of 'lust and greed.' Through worship, His grace descends. One attains God's vision and then enjoys the bliss of Brahman."[2]

Shashadhar and the devotees listen to Thakur without uttering a word.

Pundit (*humbly*): "Sir, what kind of yearning for God is needed for such a blissful state of mind?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "When your heart pants for His vision. The guru said to the disciple, 'Come here. Let me show you what kind of yearning is needed to attain God.' Saying this, the guru took him to a pond. He pushed his head under water and held him there. When he let him up, he asked the disciple, 'How did your heart feel?' The disciple said, 'My heart was panting for breath.'"

Pundit: "Yes, yes. That's it! Now I understand!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Love of God – that is the essence. Love and devotion for God. Narada said to Rama, 'May I have pure love for Your lotus feet. And may I never be enchanted by Your world-bewitching maya.' Ramachandra said, 'Ask for another boon.' Narada said, 'I want nothing else. I only want to have love and devotion for Your lotus feet.'"

The pundit is about to leave, and Thakur asks a devotee, "Please bring a carriage for him."

Pundit: "No, sir. I'll just walk."

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1. Vishyananda.
2. Brahmananda.

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "How can that be? You, even Brahma fails to find in meditation."

Pundit: "I had no particular reason to leave. But I have to perform my evening devotions."

Sri Ramakrishna in the state of a paramahamsa – renunciation of duties – sweet chanting of God's name

Sri Ramakrishna: "The Divine Mother has taken away from me sandhya and such ritualistic worship. They purify the body and the mind. I am not in that state now."

Saying this, Thakur hums the lines of a song:

> When will you lie down happily between your wives, Purity and Defilement? When you see no difference between these two, then shall you see the Divine Mother Kali.[1]

Shashadhar salutes Thakur and departs.

Ram: "I went to see Shashadhar yesterday, as you asked me to."

Sri Ramakrishna: "When did I ask you to do that? But it's good that you went."

Ram: "The editor of a newspaper (*The Indian Empire*) has run you down."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What does it matter?"

Ram: "Listen what else. After hearing me, he wouldn't let me go. He wanted to hear more about you."

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1. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section II, Chapter VI.

Dr. Pratap is still sitting there. Thakur says to him, "Come to Dakshineswar. Bhuvan (the wet-nurse) says she'll pay the carriage fare."

It is evening. Thakur is chanting the name of the Mother of the Universe. And he repeats the names of Rama, Krishna, and Hari. The devotees listen without uttering a word. His chanting of the name is sweet, as if raining honey. Today Balaram's house seems to have become Navadvip – Navadvip outside and Vrindavan inside.

Thakur will go back to Dakshineswar tonight. Balaram takes him to the inner apartments to serve him refreshments. This gives the ladies an opportunity to see him.

Seated in the sitting room, the devotees await him as they sing devotional songs together. Thakur returns and joins in the singing. The singing goes on:

My Gaur is dancing,

Dancing with the devotees to the kirtan in Srivas's courtyard.

His lips repeating "Haribol,"

He glances at Gadadhar.

From reddened eyes, Gaur's tears stream incessantly onto his golden body.

Thakur adds his own lines:

Brother, the darling of Shachi is dancing to the kirtan.

My Gaur is dancing;

This Gaur, my life-breath, is dancing.

Section XVI

Thakur at the Dakshineswar Temple with M., Rakhal, Latu, Balaram, Adhar, Devotees from Shivapur, and Others

Chapter I

Conversation on the essence of yoga with the Shivapur devotees – kundalini and piercing of the six centres

Sri Ramakrishna is seated with the devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple after the midday meal. It is about two o'clock.

A group of bauls from Shivapur and devotees from Bhawanipur have arrived. Rakhal, Latu, and Harish are now living with Thakur. Balaram and M. are also in the room.

It is Sunday, 3 August 1884, the twelfth day of the bright fortnight, the second day of the Swing Festival.[1] The previous day Thakur had visited Surendra's house. Shashadhar and other devotees had met him there.

Thakur addresses the devotees of Shivapur

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "You cannot achieve union with God when the mind dwells on 'lust and greed.' The mind of an ordinary person remains in the centres of awareness located at the genital, anal, and naval regions.[2] It takes a lot of

1. Jhulan Yatra.
2. Svadhishthana, muladhara, and manipura chakras.

effort in spiritual discipline for the kundalini to awaken. There are three nerves – ida, pingala, and sushumna. And in the sushumna are six lotuses, the lowest being the muladhara. Then there are svadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddha, and ajna. These are the six spiritual centres.

"When the kundalini awakens, after it has crossed the lotuses of muladhara, svadhisthana, and manipura, it reaches the anahata lotus located at the heart. It stays there. The mind is then withdrawn from the three lower centres of anus, sex organ, and navel; it attains a spiritual consciousness and sees a light. The aspirant is speechless with wonder and exclaims, 'What is this! What is this!'

"Having pierced six centres, the kundalini reaches the lotus of sahasrara and unites with it. When the kundalini reaches there, the aspirant passes into samadhi.

"According to the Vedas, these centres are called bhumis or planes. There are seven planes. The heart is the fourth, and the lotus at anahata is twelve-petalled.

"The vishuddha centre is the fifth plane. When the mind reaches there, the heart yearns only to talk of God and to hear about Him. This centre is located in the throat. It has a sixteen-petalled lotus. The person whose mind has reached this centre feels great pain to hear any worldly talk, such as talk of 'lust and greed.' When he hears such talk, he gets up and leaves the place.

"After this comes the sixth plane, the ajna centre of two petals. When the kundalini reaches there, one has the vision of God's form. But there is still a thin screen of separation. Like a lantern, the light can't be touched because of a glass barrier.

"Then one reaches the seventh plane, the thousand-petalled lotus. When the kundalini reaches there, samadhi comes about. The Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute Shiva resides at the sahasrara. Here He unites with Shakti – it is the union of Shiva and Shakti.

"When the mind reaches the sahasrara, one becomes absorbed in samadhi. In this state all awareness of the external disappears, and the person cannot preserve his body. If milk is poured into his mouth, it runs out. If one remains in this state, one dies in twenty-one days. A ship cannot return after it has entered the 'black waters.'

"But ishvarakotis,[1] such as incarnations of God, can come down from this state of samadhi. Since they like to live with devotees and enjoy love for God, they can descend from this state. God keeps the 'I of knowledge,' the 'I of devotion' in them to teach mankind. Their state of mind is like the swift movement of a boat, racing up and down between the sixth and the seventh planes.

"Some people, of their own will, retain the 'I of knowledge' after attaining samadhi. But this ego is a mere appearance. It is just like a line drawn on the surface of water.

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1. Eternally free and perfect souls.

"Hanuman, having realized God both with form and without, retained the 'I of a servant.' Narada and others – Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana, Sanatkumara – also retained the 'I of a servant' or the 'I of a devotee' after attaining the knowledge of Brahman. They are like big steamships which not only cross the ocean but also carry others to the opposite shore."

Is Thakur thus describing his own state?

A paramahamsa – believers in the formless God and God with form – Thakur's love for God after attaining knowledge of Brahman – union of the Absolute and the phenomenal

He says:

"A paramahamsa may believe either in God with form or the formless God. Trailanga Swami is an example of one who believed in the formless God. They care for their own good alone; they're satisfied with their own realization.

"Those who believe in God with form, even after attaining the knowledge of Brahman, live with love for God in order to teach mankind. It is like pouring water from a full pitcher into others.

"All the spiritual practices they have performed to realize God, they tell others about to help them. People dig wells for water with great effort, using spades and baskets. Some of them throw the spades and other tools into the well itself after it is dug, thinking, What use are they now? But some put the tools on the edge of the well so they may be of benefit to others.

"There are some who eat mangoes and then secretly wipe their mouths. There are others who eat and also share the mangoes with others. They work for the benefit of mankind and to enjoy the bliss of God. 'I want to eat sugar.'

"The gopis attained the knowledge of Brahman, but they didn't want the knowledge. They preferred to enjoy themselves with God – as mother and child,[1] as His beloved,[2] or as a handmaid of God."[3]

Thakur in the joy of devotional song – chanting the name of Gauranga and of the Mother of the Universe

The devotees from Shivapur are singing to the accompaniment of a gopi yantra.[4] In the first song was the line, "We are sinners, pray save us."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "It is the beginner's attitude to repeat God's name out of fear. Please sing songs about the realization of God, songs of joy. (*To Rakhal*) What a beautiful song they were singing the other day in Nabin Niyogi's house, 'Be intoxicated with the wine of Hari's name.'

"It is not good to talk only of restlessness and worries. Rather, one should be happy and become intoxicated chanting His Name."

The devotees from Shivapur: "Won't you sing a song, sir?"

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1. Vatsalya bhava.
2. Madhura bhava.
3. Dasi bhava.
4. A single-stringed musical instrument.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What shall I sing? All right, I will when I feel like it."

After a while Thakur begins to sing. His gaze turns upward.

O Bharati, give me a loincloth. I wish to go to Vraja disguised as a beggar.

He sings another song:

The wave of Gaur's love has touched my body.[1]

And another:

Come, O friend, and behold the fair one's beauty!

See Gauranga, anointed with precious ornaments, glowing red!

At the very sight, one is overwhelmed with ecstasy.

Vrishabhanunandini is indeed a great mason and Bhangada a great artisan.

And still another:

Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty.[2]

After chanting the name of Gauranga, he chants the name of the Divine Mother.

Thakur sings again:

Can everybody gain the treasure of Mother Shyama?

This foolish mind does not know how priceless this inherited treasure is.

Even with all his penance, indeed rare is Shiva's vision of Her.

Only when the mind is intoxicated, can one attain the crimson feet of the Divine Mother.

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1. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section XVI, Chapter I.
2. For the complete song refer to Section XXI, Chapter VI.

And again:

The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight to the blue lotus flower of Mother Shyama's feet.[1]

And yet again:

What a machine Mother Shyama has built!

What a machine Mother Kali has made!

In this machine, three and a half cubits high, what pranks She plays!

She Herself residing within pulls the cord and makes it move.

The machine thinks it moves by itself, knowing not who its operator is.

But the machine who knows it is She will be a machine no more.

And Mother Shyama will Herself be tied with the cord of love.

Chapter II

Thakur in samadhi and his conversation with the Mother of the Universe – essence of ecstatic love

While singing this song, Thakur goes into samadhi. The devotees gaze at him in silence. After a while, coming down to a semi-conscious state, Sri Ramakrishna talks to the Divine Mother.

"Mother, please come down here from above (from the sahasrara). You torment me! Please sit quietly!

"Mother, as are one's tendencies acquired in past births, so is one fated in this one. What can I

1. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section II, Chapter VII.

say to them? Nothing is achieved without discrimination and dispassion.

"There are different kinds of dispassion. What is called 'monkey renunciation' is one of them. It is the dispassion a person feels after being tormented by the fire of the world. It doesn't last long. Real dispassion is when a person possesses everything, lacks nothing, but it all appears to be unreal.

"This non-attachment doesn't happen all of a sudden. It comes in its own time. It's good to hear spiritual talk, because when the right time comes, then one will remember and think, 'Oh, I heard about that.'

"And there is something else. When a person hears about spiritual matters, desire for worldly enjoyment slowly decreases. To get rid of intoxication, rice-water has to be taken little by little. One gradually overcomes the state of intoxication. There are very few people who are fit for spiritual knowledge. The Gita says, 'Scarcely one out of thousands strives for perfection; of those who strive, even among the perfected, scarcely anyone truly knows Me.'

A Tantrik devotee: "Manuṣyāṇāṁ sahasreṣu kaścid yatati siddhaye."[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "The more the attachment to the world disappears, the more knowledge one will gain. *Attachment* means attachment to 'lust and greed.'"

1. The devotee quotes in Sanskrit the first half of a verse from the Bhagavad Gita, 7:3, which states that out of many thousands of men, perhaps only one endeavours for perfection.

Company of holy men, faith,[1] single-minded devotion,[2] love for God,[3] bhava, mahabhava, and prema

"Not everyone experiences ecstatic love. Gauranga did. An ordinary human being can experience ecstasy – this far and no farther. Only ishvarakotis – for example, incarnations of God – attain ecstatic love. When one attains this intense love for God, not only does he feel that the world is an illusion, but he forgets the body, which is so dear to everyone.

"A Persian book (by Hafiz) says: Under the skin there is flesh; under the flesh there is bone; within the bone there is marrow; and within that there are many other things – but underlying all these is ecstatic love.[4]

"A person becomes soft and tender-hearted through ecstatic love. In this intense love for God, Krishna's body is bent three times.[5]

"Such intense love acts as a cord to bind Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.[6] Then whenever you want to see Him, you only have to pull the cord. Whenever He is called, He appears.

"When love for God matures, one experiences ecstasy. In the state of ecstasy, one becomes speechless contemplating Sat-chit-ananda. An ordinary human being can only go that far. But

1. Shraddha.
2. Nishtha.
3. Bhakti.
4. Prema.
5. Tribhanga: Krishna playing the flute, bent at neck, waist, and knees.
6. Sat-chit-ananda.

when ecstasy matures, one experiences maha-bhava, prema. It is like the difference between an unripe mango and a ripe one.

"Pure love of God alone is the essential thing. Everything else is illusion.

"When Narada recited a hymn of praise, Rama told him to ask for a boon. Narada asked for pure love for God. And he added, 'Rama, may I never be enchanted by your world-bewitching maya.' Rama said, 'That's all right. Ask for another boon.' Narada replied, 'I want nothing else, only love and devotion.'

"How can you develop such love for God? Initially, you have to associate with the holy. By keeping their company, faith in God comes. With faith, single-minded devotion develops. Then you don't want to hear anything but talk about God. And you'll wish to work for Him alone.

"Single-minded devotion is followed by love for God. Then ecstasy, mahabhava, and prema – and then one attains the goal.

"Only incarnations of God and the like attain mahabhava and prema. The knowledge of worldly people and devotees is not like the knowledge of an incarnation of God. The knowledge of the worldly can be likened to the light of a lamp; it only lights the inside of the room. This knowledge only helps a person in eating and drinking and running household affairs – looking after the body, bringing up children, and so forth.

"The knowledge of a devotee is like the light of the moon. He can see both the inside and the

outside of a room with its light – but not a very small object lying at a distance. On the other hand, the knowledge of incarnations is like the light of the sun. They can see inside, outside, the small, and the large, everything.

"The mind of worldly people is like turbid water; it can only be cleaned by pouring a cleansing agent[1] in it. Discrimination and non-attachment are cleansing agents."

Now Thakur talks to the devotees of Shivapur.

The need for hearing about God – 'the proper time' – normal state of Thakur

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ask if you have any questions."

A devotee: "Sir, we have listened to everything."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's good to hear – but nothing happens before the proper time.

"How can quinine help a patient who is running a high fever? It should be administered after the fever mixture has been given and the bowels have moved – when the fever has subsided. But, of course, some people are cured naturally; they get well even without taking quinine.

"When going to bed, a child said, 'Mother, please wake me up when I need to go to the bathroom.' His mother said, 'Child, I won't have to wake you. The urge itself will wake you up.'

"I see some people coming here with devotees in a boat. They don't like to hear about God. They

1. Nirmali: a rare kind of nut that precipitates dirt in water.

poke their friend, asking, 'When are you leaving? When are you going?' When the friend doesn't rise, however much pressed, they say, 'All right, I'll go and wait for you in the boat.'

"Those who are born as human beings for the first time need to enjoy the things of the world. Spiritual awakening does not come until a lot of work has been done."

Thakur is going to the jhautala. He speaks to M. on the semicircular verandah.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Well, what do you think of my state of mind?"

M. (*smiling*): "Sir, outwardly you are very simple, but within you are deep. It is very difficult to understand you."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Yes. Just as people see only the surface of a floor. They don't know what lies below its surface."

At the bathing landing of the chandni, Balaram and other devotees are getting on a boat bound for Calcutta. It is four o'clock. It is ebb tide, and a southern breeze decorates the surface of the Ganges with a necklace of ripples.

Balaram's boat sails toward Baghbazar. M. watches it for a long time, until it disappears from view. Then he returns to Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna comes down from the western verandah, on his way to the jhautala. There are beautiful clouds in the northwest. Thakur says, "Is it going to rain? Please bring the umbrella." M. brings it. Latu accompanies him.

Thakur has reached the panchavati. He says to Latu, "Why are you looking so unwell?"

Latu: "I can hardly eat anything."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Is that the only reason? The weather isn't good. And maybe you meditate too much."

Thakur now talks to M.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "You must do this. Please ask Baburam to come and stay here for a day or two when Rakhal goes away. Otherwise, I shall feel unhappy."

M.: "As you wish. I'll tell him."

One can realize God when one is simple and guileless at heart. Thakur asks if Baburam is simple at heart.

Sri Ramakrishna beholds a beautiful sight in the jhautala and panchavati

Thakur is returning from the jhautala, passing along its southern side. M. and Latu stand under the panchavati to the north and watch him.

Behind Thakur, newly arisen clouds beautify the sky, their reflection darkening the water of the Ganges.

> Thakur approaches, as if the Lord Himself had assumed a human form and come to the mortal world for the welfare of the devotees. He strolls on the bank of the Ganges, the destroyer of all sins, having emerged from Lord Hari's lotus feet. It is as if the Lord Himself is present. Is that why the trees, creepers, bushes, garden paths, shrines, images of the

gods, attendants, door-keepers, and every particle of dust feel so sweet?

Chapter III

Nabai Chaitanya, Narendra, Baburam, Latu, Mani, Rakhal, Niranjan, and Adhar

Thakur comes into his room and sits down. Balaram has brought some mangoes, and Thakur says to Ram Chatterji, "Please take some mangoes for your son." Nabai Chaitanya is also in the room, dressed in a red dhoti.

Thakur is speaking with Hazra on the long northern verandah. The topic of their conversation is the harital ash[1] that a brahmachari has given to Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna: "The medicine the brahmachari gave me suits me very much. The man is correct."

Hazra: "But the poor fellow has gotten caught up in worldly life. What can he do? Nabai Chaitanya has come from Konnagar. But even though he's a householder, he's dressed himself in a red dhoti."[2]

Sri Ramakrishna: "What can I say? I see that God Himself has taken the forms of everyone. So, I'm not able to say anything critical to anyone."

Thakur comes back into his room and then talks with Hazra about Narendra.

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1. Yellow orpiment, a compound of sulfur and arsenic.
2. A householder traditionally wears white.

Hazra: "Narendra has gotten entangled in a lawsuit again."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He doesn't believe in Shakti. When a person has taken a human body, he must accept Shakti."

Hazra: "He says, 'If I accept it, everyone will accept it. So how can I?'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's not good to go that far. He has now come under the jurisdiction of Shakti. Even a judge has to stand in the witness box if he gives evidence.

(*To M.*) "Have you seen Narendra?"

M.: "Not recently, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do meet him and bring him here in a carriage."

(*To Hazra*) "Well, what is his relation with this place [meaning himself]?"

Hazra: "He will receive help from you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And Bhavanath? Would he come here so often if he didn't have good tendencies?[1]

"And Harish and Latu – they're always meditating. What do you think about that?"

Hazra: "What is the sense in only meditating? It would be better if they rendered you personal service."

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1. Samskaras.

Sri Ramakrishna: "That will come about. Perhaps some others will come to take their place."

Different instructions to Mani – Sri Ramakrishna's simple and natural state[1]

Hazra goes back to his room. There is still time before evening worship, and Thakur sits in his room, talking privately with Mani.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Tell me, are people attracted by what I say in ecstasy?"

Mani: "Yes sir, a lot."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do they think of it? Do they feel anything when they see the state of ecstasy?"

Mani: "We feel that there is knowledge, intense love for God, and dispassion all in the same person. And on top of that, simplicity and guilelessness. So many ships have sailed through the depths of your consciousness, but you are natural and so simple! Not many people can understand it, but a few are attracted by that state alone."

Sri Ramakrishna: "According to the Ghoshpara sect, God is called 'sahaja,' or 'simple.' They say you can't recognize the Simple without being simple yourself."

Sri Ramakrishna and pride and egoism – "I am an instrument and You are the operator"

1. Sahajavastha.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Well, do I have any ego?"

Mani: "Yes, you have a little. To preserve your body and to enjoy love for God – and for the devotees, to impart spiritual knowledge to them. You have kept it by praying for it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I haven't kept it. It is God who has kept it in me. Tell me, what happens when I'm in the state of ecstasy?"

Mani: "You said earlier that when the mind rises to the sixth plane, you see forms of god. Later, when you speak, your mind comes down to the fifth plane."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is God who does all this. I know nothing."

Mani: "That is why you attract people so much."

Why so many scriptures? – all religions are true – Sri Ramakrishna and the reconciliation of contradictory scriptures

Mani: "Sir, there are different opinions in the scriptures. According to one Purana, Krishna is considered pure consciousness[1] and Radha the power of consciousness.[2] According to another Purana, Krishna is said to be Kali, the Primordial Energy."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The Devi Purana says this. According to it, Kali Herself has become Krishna.

1. Chidatma.
2. Chitshakti.

"That might be true! God is infinite, and so are the paths to reach Him."

Mani sits silently for a while after hearing this.

Mani: "Now I understand. It's like what you say about climbing to the roof. The aim is to reach the roof by any way we can – by rope, bamboo, or any other means."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is God's grace that you have understood this much. It's not possible to become free from doubt without His grace.

"The important thing is somehow to develop love for God. What is the use of knowing different paths? If you can gain love for Him by treading one particular path, you have achieved everything. It is only by developing love for Him that you can attain Him. Later, if there is a need, God will make you understand everything. He will show the other paths. It's enough just to develop love for God. What is the need to reason and discuss various ideas? You have come to eat mangoes. Eat them. What need is there to count how many branches and leaves there are? Hanuman's attitude is, 'I don't know the date, the day of the week, or the position of the stars. I only contemplate Rama.'"

Renunciation of the world and God-realization – should the devotee save, or be 'satisfied with whatever comes of its own accord'?

Mani: "I now desire for my work and duties to be reduced to a large extent so I can give a lot of my mind to God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah! What else can be needed! But a man of knowledge can live unattached in the household."

Mani: "But sir, a special power is needed to live unattached."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, that's true. But perhaps you wanted a worldly life. Krishna dwelt in Radha's heart, but when she wanted, his divine sport was enacted in human form.

"Now pray that all this work and duties may be reduced.

"Besides, renunciation from the heart is enough."

Mani: "Mental renunciation is for those who can't renounce outwardly. For people of a high class, there is complete renunciation – renunciation in the heart as well as external renunciation."

Thakur is silent. Then he continues the discussion.

Sri Ramakrishna: "How did you like what I said about renunciation?"[1]

Mani: "Yes, I did like it, sir."

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1. Vairagya.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What does dispassion mean? Let me hear it from you."

Mani: "It not only means renunciation of worldly life. It means love for God together with dispassion for the world."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, you are right.

"You do need money in worldly life, but you mustn't be anxious and worry too much about it. You must be content with whatever comes of its own accord[1] – this is very good. Don't worry too much about saving for the future. Those who surrender their mind and soul to God, those who are His devotees and have taken refuge in Him, don't worry too much about saving. As they earn, so they spend – from one side it comes, and out the other it's spent. This is what is called accepting what comes of its own accord. It is mentioned in the Gita."

Conversation about Haripada, Rakhal, Baburam, Adhar, and others

Thakur is talking about Haripada, who had visited him the other day.

Mani (*smiling*): "Haripada knows how to relate stories of the gods. He chants the life of Prahlada and the story of Sri Krishna's birth very melodiously."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Really! The other day, I looked into his eyes. They were unsettled. I asked him if he practiced a lot of meditation, but he sat

1. Yadṛcchālābha, Bhagavad Gita 4:22.

with his head down. I said to him, 'You mustn't practice to extremes.'"

It is evening. Thakur chants the name of the Divine Mother and meditates upon Her.

After some time, evening worship with the waving of lights starts in the shrines. It is the twelfth day of the bright fortnight of Shravana and the second day of the Cradle Festival. The moon is shining, bathing the temple, the surrounding courtyard, and the garden in its light. It is eight in the evening. Thakur is seated in his room with Rakhal and M.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Baburam says, 'Worldly life – it's dreadful!'"

M.: "What is he saying? What does Baburam know of household life?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, undoubtedly that's true. Have you seen Niranjan? He is completely guileless."

M.: "Yes, sir. He is very attractive. And how expressive his eyes are!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Not only his eyes – everything. He told me that they were going to get him married. To that, he said, 'Why do you want to drown me?' (*Laughing*) But people say what pleasure they have, sitting in the company of their wives after a hard day's work."

M.: "Certainly they do, those who are so inclined. (*Smiling, to Rakhal*) We are being examined with a leading question."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "A mother says, 'I will feel great relief if I can find a shade tree[1] for my son. He will rest in its shade after being burnt by the fire of this world.'"

M.: "Sir, there are different kinds of parents. A spiritually illumined father doesn't give his sons in marriage. If he does, he must be well liberated indeed!" (*Thakur laughs.*)

Adhar and M. visit the Kali temple – Adhar talks about the sacred Chandranath and visit to Sitakunda

Adhar Sen arrives from Calcutta and salutes Thakur by prostrating. After sitting for a short time, he goes to the Kali Temple for Kali's darshan. M. visits Kali with him. Then he comes to the portico[2] of the temple and then goes and sits on the bank of the Ganges. The river sparkles in the moonlight as the flood tide has just begun to rise.

> Seated alone, M. meditates on the wonderful life of Thakur, his amazing state of samadhi and repeated ecstasies, and his intense love for God; his unceasing talk about God, his genuine love for the devotees, his childlike nature – he thinks of all these things. He says to himself, Who is he? Has God Himself come down in a human body for the sake of His devotees?

Adhar and M. return to Thakur's room. Adhar had been in Chattigram on a business trip. He is talking now about his visit to sacred Chandranath and the Sitakunda.

Adhar: "I saw tongues of fire burning in the water of Sitakunda."

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1. A wife.
2. Chandni.

Sri Ramakrishna: “How does that happen?”

Adhar: “There is phosphorous in the water.”

Ram Chatterji comes into the room. Thakur praises him to Adhar, saying, “As Ram is here, we don’t have to worry. He finds Harish, Latu, and others at mealtime. Sometimes they are sitting alone in different places meditating. It is Ram who finds them and takes them to eat.”

Section XVII

Thakur with Narendra and Other Devotees at Adhar's House

Chapter I

Thakur in the joy of devotional singing with Narendra and other devotees – in samadhi

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting with devotees in the parlour on the second storey of Adhar's home. Narendra, the two Mukherji brothers, Bhavanath, M., Chunilal, Hazra, and other devotees are seated near Thakur. It is about three o'clock, Saturday, 6 September 1884, 22nd day of Bhadra, 1291 B.Y., the first day of the dark fortnight.

The devotees salute Sri Ramakrishna. After M. has saluted him, Thakur says to Adhar, "Isn't Doctor Nitai coming?"

Preparations are being made for Narendra to sing. A tanpura string snaps as it is being tuned, and Thakur says, "My, what you have done!" Now Narendra tunes the banyas. Thakur says, "Your banya tuning is like a slap on the cheek."

They talk about different kirtans. Narendra says, "There is no regular beat or rhythm in kirtan songs. That's why they're so popular. People love them."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What are you saying! There is such feeling of compassion in them – that's why people like them."

Narendra sings:

Sweet is Your name, O refuge of the lowly.[1]

He sings another song:

Will my days just pass in vain, O Lord?[2]

Day and night my eyes are on the path of hope.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to Hazra*): "He sang the same song when he visited me for the first time."

After Narendra sings a couple of songs more, Vaishnavcharan sings:

O Hari, how shall I know You now?

O Bankura, living in Mathura, clad in royal splendour and riding elephants,

Have you forgotten the grazing of cows? Have you forgotten us?

Do you remember how you stole butter in Vraja?

Sri Ramakrishna: "Sing this song: 'O my vina, play Hari, Hari.'"

Vaishnavcharan sings:

O my vina[3], sing Hari, Hari!

Without Hari's holy feet, you will not gain the Supreme Truth.

The name of Hari destroys all sorrows. Chant 'Hare Krishna, Hare.'

By Hari's grace, I shall have no worldly distress.

O Vina, sing but once the name of Hari. There is no haven but His name.

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1. For the complete song refer to Section XIX, Chapter III.
2. For the complete song refer to Volume III, Appendix, Chapter I.
3. A stringed instrument.

The servant, Govinda, says, 'In vain my days have passed. May I no longer drift on the world's shoreless ocean.'

Thakur occasionally goes into samadhi – he dances

Listening to the song, Sri Ramakrishna becomes absorbed in ecstasy and exclaims, "Ah, ah! Chant Hari, Hari."

While saying this, he passes into samadhi, surrounded by devotees who watch him. The room is full of people.

The kirtan singer stops this song and begins a new one.

The beautiful and youthful Gauranga of golden hue dances best.

When he sings the line, "Drifting away in the flood of intense love for Hari," Thakur stands up and begins to dance. Then he sits down and, stretching his arms out, improvises: "O, utter the name of Hari once."

Thakur becomes overwhelmed with emotion as he improvises. Bending his head, he goes into samadhi. In front of him is a bolster on which he rests his head. The musician sings another song:

What other wealth is there in the world except the name of Hari?

Sweetly sing, "Madhai."

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare.

Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.

Another song follows:

My Gaur dances singing Hari's name,

My Gauranga dances amid a mountain of gold.

Gold anklets sweetly jingle on his red feet.

Dear Narahari, remain beside Gauranga.

His body made of Radha's love lies in dust.

To his left Advaitananda, to his right Nityananda,

And in the middle dances my Lord Chaitanya.

Thakur rises and dances while he improvises: "Oh, let us become intoxicated with intense love for God."

Watching the wonderful dance, Narendra and the other devotees cannot remain still. They all join Thakur in the dance.

Thakur now and then goes into samadhi while dancing. Then he becomes completely withdrawn and does not utter a word; his whole body is still. The devotees dance in a circle around him.

After a while, Thakur regains partial consciousness, like Chaitanya Deva used to do. And then he dances with the strength of a lion. But even then there is no word on his tongue – he is nearly mad with love for God!

Whenever he returns to partial consciousness, he continues to improvise lines for the song.

Today Adhar's parlour has become Srivasa's courtyard.[1] Many people gather on the road when they hear the chant of Hari's names.

After dancing with the devotees for a long time, Thakur again sits down. Still in an ecstatic mood,

1. Srivasa Pundit was a close companion of Sri Chaitanya Deva. It was at his house that Sri Chaitanya and his associates used to have sankirtan all night long.

he asks Narendra, "Please sing that song: 'O Mother, make me mad with Your love.'"

At Thakur's behest, Narendra sings:

O Mother, make me mad with Your love.[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "And also: 'In the sea of the bliss of consciousness.'"

Narendra sings:

The waves of ecstatic love for God rise on the sea of the bliss of consciousness.

The sweet play of intense bliss[2] has overwhelmed me.

All has become one in the great union.[3]

All divides and distinctions of time and space have disappeared.

Now raising your arms in the inebriation of bliss, with the mind sing Hari's name.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "And that song: 'In the firmament of my soul.' No, it's too long, isn't it? Well, please sing a little slowly."

Narendra sings:

In the firmament of wisdom, the moon of divine love rises full.[4]

Sri Ramakrishna: "And that one: 'The wine of the name of Hari.'"

Narendra sings:

O my mind, be drunk with the wine of divine love;

Rolling on the ground, weep and chant the name of Hari...

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1. For the complete song refer to Section XIX, Chapter III.
2. Mahabhava.
3. Mahayoga.
4. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section I, Chapter II.

Thakur improvises, adding lines to the song:

Be drunk O my mind, with intense love for God, and weep, chanting, 'Hari, Hari.'

Drunk with ecstasy, weep and chant Hari's name.

Thakur and the devotees rest for a while. Narendra whispers to Thakur, "Will you please sing that song once?"

Sri Ramakrishna says, "My throat is a little sore."

After a while, he asks Narendra, "Which one?"

Narendra: "'Your world-enchanting beauty.'"

Thakur slowly sings:

Who has brought Gaur to Nadia,

Gaur whose beauty enchants the world?

His face, hidden by tresses of hair,

Shines like lightning amidst the clouds.

Bring him near that I may glimpse the Lord.

He sings another song:

O gopi friend,[1] I have not found Shyama.[2]

How can I find any joy at home?

Could Shyama but be the tresses of my hair,

I would lovingly braid it with bakul flowers.

I would carefully braid my Keshava-hair.[3]

Shyama is black, and black is my hair; black would be one with black.

---

1. Sakhi.
2 "The Dark One," a name of Krishna.
3 Keshava: a name of Krishna.

Could Shyama but be my nose ring, He would ever grace my face,

And know the tender touch of my lips.

But why, O friend, should I dream of what never can be?

Why should Shyama be away from me?

Could Shyama be my bracelets, He would ever adorn my arms.

I would walk shaking my arms and jingling my bracelets.

Wearing the bracelets of Shyama, O friend, I would walk down the royal road.

Chapter II

Insight in the state of ecstasy – invitation to Narendra and others

The singing has ended. Thakur talks with Narendra, Bhavanath, and other devotees. Smiling, he says, "Hazra danced."

Narendra (*smiling*): "Yes, sir. A little."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "A little?"

Narendra (*smiling*): "His paunch danced and also another thing."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "It dances by itself. You don't have to move it; it moves on its own." (*All laugh*.)

The conversation now turns to the invitation to Thakur by the man in whose home Shashadhar now resides.

Narendra: "Will the master of the house provide food?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "I hear he doesn't have a good character, that he's a scoundrel."

Narendra: "That's why, when you met Shashadhar for the first time, you didn't drink water from the glass touched by his host. How did you know he had a bad character?"

His earlier story – at Sihore in Hriday's house with Hazra and a Vaishnava

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Hazra knows of another instance. It was at Hriday's house in Sihore."

Hazra: "He was a Vaishnava. He went with me to visit him [Sri Ramakrishna]. As soon as he came in and sat down, he [Sri Ramakrishna] turned his back on him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "We heard afterwards that he acted lewdly toward his maternal aunt. (*To Narendra*) At first you used to say that my states were only hallucinations."

Narendra: "What can I say? Now I have seen so much. It all tallies."

Narendra means to say that when Thakur is in ecstasy, he can see the inside and outside of a person. He has confirmed this a number of times.

Sri Ramakrishna on caste of devotees

Adhar has made great preparations for serving Thakur and the devotees. He now invites them to eat.

Thakur says to Mahendra and Priyanath, the two Mukherji brothers, "Aren't you coming to eat?"

They humbly ask to be excused.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "They are doing everything else. But now hesitating about eating?

"A woman's father-in-law was named Hari and her husband's elder brother, Krishna. Now the name of Hari had to be chanted, but she wouldn't say Hare Krishna. Instead, she repeated:

> Phare Phrishta phare Phrishta, Phrishta, Phrishta Phare Phare.
>
> Phare Rama, Phare Rama, Rama Rama Phare Phare.

Adhar is a goldsmith by caste. That is why some brahmin devotees are initially hesitant to eat in his house. But later, when they see that Sri Ramakrishna himself eats there, they give up this wrong notion.

It is about 9 p.m. Thakur has joyfully eaten his meal with Narendra, Bhavanath, and other devotees.

Now he comes to the parlour to rest. Preparations are being made for his return to Dakshineswar.

The Mukherji brothers have arranged for a kirtan at Dakshineswar tomorrow, Sunday, for Thakur's enjoyment. Shyamdas, a professional musician, will sing. Ram studies devotional music from him at his home.

Thakur asks Narendra to come to Dakshineswar the next day.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "Will you come tomorrow?"

Narendra: "I'll try."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You can eat there if you like.

"M. can also eat there. (*To M.*) Are you over your illness? Are you on a diet?"

M.: "No, sir. I shall be there."

Nityagopal is in Vrindavan. Some days ago Chunilal returned from there. Thakur gets news of Nityagopal from him.

Thakur is ready to return to Dakshineswar. M. salutes him, touching Thakur's feet with his forehead.

Thakur says to him affectionately, "Do come."

(*To Narendra and others, affectionately*): "Narendra, Bhavanath – please come."

Narendra, Bhavanath, and other devotees salute him by prostrating. They all return home, their minds recalling Thakur's wonderful singing and dancing with the devotees during the kirtan.

It is the first day of the dark fortnight of the month of Bhadra. The moon shines brightly in the night, as if laughing. Sri Ramakrishna proceeds towards Dakshineswar in a carriage with Bhavanath, Hazra, and other devotees.

Section XVIII

Sri Ramakrishna with Ram, Baburam, M., Chuni, Adhar, Bhavanath, Niranjan, and Other Devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

Life of Thakur in his own words – beliefs of the Ghoshpara and Kartabhaja sects

Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the smaller cot in his room at the Dakshineswar temple with devotees. It is about eleven o'clock. He has not yet been served the noon meal.

Yesterday, on Saturday, Thakur paid a visit to Adhar Sen's house with the devotees. He made everyone happy by celebrating the Lord Hari's name through devotional singing. Today Shyamdas will perform kirtan. Many devotees are assembling to witness Thakur's joy in devotional singing.

The first to arrive are Baburam, M., the brahmin from Srirampur, Manomohan, Bhavanath, and Kishori. Then Chunilal, Haripada, and others come, followed by the Mukherji brothers, Ram, Surendra, Tarak, Adhar, and Niranjan. Latu, Harish, and Hazra are now staying at Dakshineswar. Ramlal is the priest in Mother Kali's temple, and he looks after Thakur. Ram Chakravarty is the priest in the Vishnu temple. Today is Sunday, 7 September 1884 ; 23rd Bhadra, 1291 B.Y., the second day of the dark fortnight of Bhadra.

After M. has saluted Thakur, Sri Ramakrishna says to him, "Hasn't Narendra come?"

Narendra could not come that day. The brahmin from Srirampur has brought a book of songs by Ramprasad. Now and then he reads some of the songs to Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the brahmin*): "My dear, do continue reading."

Brahmin: "Put on clothes, Mother – "

Sri Ramakrishna: "Stop! Songs like this are absolutely useless. Read only those songs that inspire love and devotion for God."

Brahmin: "Who can know what Kali is? Even the six philosophies cannot reveal Her."

Thakur's sympathetic friend – the paramahamsa, the baul, and the sai

Yesterday at Adhar's house I felt a pain in one of my legs when I was in ecstasy. That's why I take Baburam with me. He is a sympathetic soul.

Saying this, Thakur sings:

How can I tell you, O friend, what is in my heart?

I am forbidden to speak.

I cannot live without a kindred soul.

Such a one can be recognized from the look of his eyes.

Rare indeed is such a soul who swims in bliss on a tide of intense love.

The man of the heart trades in love.

Where can one find a man of the heart,

Who carries under his arm only a tattered rag?

He says not a word, but travels on the high road.

A man of the heart only walks along the higher path.

"The bauls sing songs like this. And they also sing songs like this one:

Wait, O wandering monk, with your water-pot![1]

Stand and let me behold your beauty.

"According to Shaktas, a perfected soul[2] is called a kaul. In the Vedanta, he is called a paramahamsa. The Vaishnava bauls call him a sai. 'There is none greater than a sai.'

"When a baul attains perfection, he is known as a sai. For him there is no distinction – half of his necklace is made of cow-bones and the other half of the sacred tulsi plant.

"Hindus call him Nir and Muslims call him Pir."

Alekh (the incomprehensible) – about the spiritual current – spiritual centre – the function of syrup – taking the pot off

"A sai calls the Ultimate Reality 'Alekh.' In the Vedas it is called Brahman; the sais call Him Alekh, the incomprehensible. They say of the individual soul that Alekh comes and Alekh departs. That is to say, the individual soul comes from the unmanifest and then merges back into it.

"The Bauls ask, 'Do you know about the wind?'

1. Kamandalu, or water pot of a wandering ascetic, a symbol of renunciation and purification.
2. Siddha.

That is, about the rising of the spiritual current[1] within the ida, pingala, and sushumna, when the kundalini is awakened.

"They ask, 'In which centre[2] are you?' The sixth centre is the sixth centre of consciousness.

"If he says that he is in the fifth, it means that his mind has risen to the vishuddha spiritual centre.

(*To M.*) "There is the vision of the formless God then. As the song says."

Saying this, Thakur chants: "Within the petals of this lotus lies hidden a secret, subtle space. Passing beyond it, one beholds the world dissolve."

His earlier story – arrival of the Bauls and followers of the Kartabhaja and Ghoshpara

"A baul once came here. I asked him, 'Has your syrup been refined? Is the pot down from the fire?' The more you boil syrup, the more refined it becomes. First you have sugarcane juice. Then it turns into molasses, then into jaggery,[3] and then sugar, then sugar candy; last of all are sugar balls. It becomes refined more and more only gradually.

"When should the pot be taken down? In other words, when will spiritual practices end? They will end when the senses are conquered. Senses are loosened the same way a leech drops off when lime is applied to it. Though one might live with a

1. Mahavayu.
2. Pitha.
3.Gur, the stage in the refinement of sugar in which it is moist and dark brown.

woman, one does not engage in intercourse with her.

"Many of these people conduct themselves according to the Radha Tantra. They practise spiritual disciplines with the five basic elements – earth, water, fire, air, and ether – through the use of excrement, urine, menstrual flow, and semen. It is a very dirty practice, like entering a home through the toilet.

"One day when I was eating in the courtyard, a man of the Ghoshpara sect came. He asked, 'Are you eating, or are you feeding someone else?' The meaning was that the person who attains spiritual perfection sees that God dwells within.

"Those who perfect themselves in this sect call people of other sects 'bound souls.'[1] They don't talk in the presence of people of different views, saying, 'There are strangers here.'"

His earlier story – visit to his birthplace. In Shari Pathar's house with Hriday

"I saw a woman of this belief in my native village – Shari (Saraswati) Pathar. People of this sect eat in each other's houses, but they won't take a meal in the homes of people of other sects. The Mallicks ate at Shari Pathar's house, but they didn't eat at Hriday's. They say that these people are 'bound souls.' (*Laughter*.)

"One day when I was taking a stroll, I went to her house with Hriday. She had a beautiful tulsi

1. Jiva.

garden. She offered parched rice with urad lentils. I ate some. Hriday ate a lot – then he felt sick.

"They call the state of perfection[1] natural (sahaja). There is a class of people who go around saying, 'sahaja, sahaja.' They mention two characteristics of this state of sahaja: one, the body no longer has the 'smell of Krishna'; two, a bee will sit on a lotus but will not sip its honey. That there is no 'smell of Krishna' means that all divine feelings are within and there are no outward signs, not even the name of Hari on his lips. And the meaning of the second is that there is no attachment to women – one has acquired mastery over the senses.

"They don't like worship of the deity in an image or the like. They want a living person. That is why they are known as Kartabhaja, that is, those who adore and worship [bhaja] the spiritual preceptor [karta] – the guru – as God Himself."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and the harmony of religions – why all scriptures and all religions are true

Sri Ramakrishna: "You see how many doctrines there are? Every belief is a way to reach God. Innumerable are the beliefs and paths."

Bhavanath: "Then, what is the way for us?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You have to hold on to one of the paths tightly. To reach the roof, you can climb brick steps. You can also climb a bamboo ladder or

1. Siddha.

a ladder made of rope. Also a piece of rope or a piece of bamboo will take you up. But if you place your foot first on one path and then on another, your effort will be in vain. You have to hold tightly to one. If you want to attain God, you have to take one path resolutely.

"And you should think of all religions as so many paths. You must never entertain the idea that your path is correct and all others are false. You must have no feeling of malice toward other beliefs."

To which path do I belong? The beliefs of Keshab, Shashadhar and Vijay

"So, to which path do 'I' belong? Keshab used to say, 'You have the same path as we do – you are gradually accepting the formless God.' Shashadhar used to say, 'You belong to us.' Vijay (Goswami) also used to say that I belonged to his path."

Is Thakur saying that since he has reached God by treading all the paths, he knows all of them? And that people of all religions will come to him and find peace?

Thakur goes toward the panchavati with M. and one or two other devotees. He wants to wash his face. It is twelve o'clock. The flood tide is about to begin. Hearing about it, Thakur waits for a while on the path to the panchavati.

Essence of bhava and mahabhava – Thakur watches the tides on the Ganges

Thakur says to the devotees, "What a wonderful thing the flood and ebb tides are!

"But notice this – they only occur in the river when it is near the sea. Away from the sea, the current flows only in the one direction. What does this mean? Dwell on that fact. Only those who are very near to God experience divine emotions and love for God. One or two (ishvarakotis) may have mahabhava, intense love for God, and so on.

(*To M.*) "Well, why are there flood and ebb tides?"

M.: "Western astronomy says that they are caused by the pull of the sun and the moon."

M. draws figures on the ground to show the movements of the earth, the moon, and the sun. Looking at them for a moment, Thakur says, "Oh, stop! It makes my head reel."

As they are talking, the flood tide rises. Soon the sound of the rising waters begins to be heard. Striking the bank near the temples, the flood flows toward the north.

Thakur watches the tide fixedly. Noticing a boat in the distance, he suddenly exclaims like a child, "Look, look! What's going to happen to that boat?"

While they are talking, Sri Ramakrishna and M. come to the foot of the panchavati. Thakur places his umbrella on the platform. He now talks about Narayan, whom he looks upon as the very manifestation of Narayana (the Lord Himself). He is very fond of him. Narayan is a student.

Instructions to M. – right use of money – his concern for Narayan

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Have you noticed Narayan's nature? He can associate with everybody – with the old as well as the young. This isn't possible without some special power. Besides, everybody loves him. Is he really so simple and guileless?"

M.: "Yes, sir. He appears to be very guileless."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Does he visit you?"

M.: "Yes, sir, he did come once or twice."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Would you give him a rupee, or should I ask Kali about it?"

M.: "Very well, sir. I'll give him one myself."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Very good. It's good to give to those who love God. That's the right use of money. What good is spending everything in worldly pursuits?"

Kishori[1] has children, but he doesn't earn much – not enough to meet his needs. Thakur says to M., "Narayan was telling me that he would find work for Kishori. Do remind him of it."

M. is standing in the panchavati. Thakur returns from the jhautala after a while. He says to M., "Please ask someone to spread a mat outside my room. I'll be back soon. I'd like to lie down for a while."

Reaching his room, Thakur says, "None of you remembered to bring the umbrella back. (*All*

1. M.'s brother.

laugh.) A scattered mind doesn't notice something even if it is nearby. A fellow went to a friend's house to light some charcoal for his tobacco. And he was holding a lantern in his own hand!

"Another fellow, looking everywhere for his hand towel, found it on his own shoulder!"

Thakur's midday meal – Baburam and other intimate companions

The prasad of Mother Kali is brought for Thakur. It is about one o'clock. After eating he wants to rest for a while, but the devotees remain sitting in the room. When they are told, they go outside. Harish, Niranjan, and Haripada will go to the dining room to have their midday meal. Thakur says to Harish, "Please take some amsattva (a thin cake made of mango juice) for yourself."

Thakur rests for a while. He says to Baburam, "Baburam, please come sit near me." Baburam answers, "I am preparing betel leaf."

Sri Ramakrishna says, "Leave it. Don't make the betel leaf."

While Thakur rests, a number of devotees sit under the bakul tree in the panchavati – the Mukherji brothers, Chunilal, Haripada, Bhavanath, and Tarak. Tarak has just returned from Vrindavan. The devotees listen to him talk about Vrindavan. He was there with Nityagopal.

Chapter III

Thakur in the joy of devotional singing – dancing with devotees

Thakur has rested for a while. Shyamdas begins singing songs relating to episodes in Mathura.

First he sings:

Lord, the joy of seeing You…

And then:

The lake of happiness seemed to them[1] as dry as the desert.

The chatak bird dying of thirst gazes at the clouds.

Thakur goes into an ecstatic mood, hearing about Radha's state of separation from Krishna. He is sitting on the smaller cot while Baburam, Niranjan, Ram, Manomohan, M., Surendra, Bhavanath, and other devotees sit on the floor. But the music has not yet picked up rhythm.

He asks Nabai Chaitanya of Konnagar to sing. Nabai is Manomohan's uncle.[2] Having retired with a pension, he practices spiritual disciplines and devotional singing[3] on the bank of the Ganges at Konnagar. He often visits Thakur.

Nabai sings in a loud voice. Leaving his seat, Thakur begins to dance. Immediately Nabai and the devotees begin to dance and sing the kirtan in a circle around him. The kirtan atmosphere becomes

1. The gopis of Vrindavan.
2. Nabai is the younger brother of Manomohan's father.
3. Sadhan and bhajan.

intense with spiritual fervour. Even Mahimacharan begins to dance with Thakur.

Thakur returns to his seat when the kirtan ends. After repeating Hari's name, he repeats the name of the All-Blissful Mother. He is absorbed in divine emotion and repeats the name of the Divine Mother. He begins to sing of Her, his eyes turned upward.

He sings:

O Mother, who are Bliss itself, do not deprive me of Your bliss…

Again he sings:

As is one's meditation, so is his heart moved by love.

As one feels, so does he gain. The root of all is faith.

If the mind can dip into the reservoir of nectar that is Mother Kali's feet,

Then worship and oblations,[1] sacrifices and rituals are of no avail.

And again:

O Mother Tara, this world is Your madhouse!

What shall I say of Your virtues?

Giving up Your elephant you ride on a bull like one depraved. Willfully you cast aside Your jewels and pearls and put on a garland of skulls.

Unmindful of others, You roam the cremation grounds.

Says Ramprasad, You must lead me beyond my wanderings in this maze of the world.

And again:

1. Homa.

Why go to Gaya, Ganga, Prabhas, Kashi, or Kanchi, if I can breathe my last chanting Kali's name?

Of what use are rituals for one who utters Kali's name at dawn and noon and dusk? Worship itself will follow in his footsteps, never catching up.

Charity, vows, and almsgiving no longer appeal to Madan's mind. His worship alone is surrender at the Mother's blessed feet.

Lord Shiva Himself, the God of Gods, with all His powers, sings Her praises. Who, then, can conceive of the power of Her holy name?

Then he sings:

Dwell, O my mind, within yourself,

And enter no one else's house.

If you search within yourself,

You will find there all you seek.[1]

He sings:

The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight to the blue lotus flower of Mother Shyama's feet.[2]

And once more he sings:

Cherish the beloved Mother Shyama in your heart.

O mind, may you and I alone behold Her, and let no one else intrude.[3]

Thakur stands up while singing this song. He is nearly intoxicated with intense love for the Divine Mother. He repeats again and again the words 'the revered Mother Shyama,' as though for the benefit of the devotees.

1. For the complete song refer to Section XII, Chapter IX of Volume I
2. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section II, Chapter VII.
3. For the complete song refer to Section IX, Chapter I.

He appears intoxicated, as though he has drunk too much wine. He dances now as he sings:

> Is my Mother really black? The Naked One, in her blackness, lights up the lotus of my heart.

Noticing that Thakur is staggering while he is singing, Niranjan goes up to him to hold him. In a sweet voice, Thakur stops him, saying, "Don't touch me, you rascal." Seeing Thakur dancing, the devotees rise to their feet. He grasps M.'s hand and says, "Dance, you rascal!"

Mahima, the Vedantist, in the company of Thakur – dancing during the kirtan, and Thakur's joy

Thakur sits on his bed. He is filled with divine intoxication.

When the ecstasy subsides a little, he says, "Om, Om, Om, Om, Om, Om, Kali." And then he says, "I want a smoke." Most of the devotees are standing. Mahimacharan fans Thakur as he stands.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Please sit down, all of you. (*To Mahima*) Please recite something from the Vedas."

Mahimacharan recites "Victory to Jajjman" and so forth. And then he recites a verse from the Mahanirvana Tantra.

> Om, I bow to You, the true origin of the universe.
>
> I bow to You, the support of all the universe, whose essence is pure Consciousness.
>
> I bow to You who are non-dual, the One, the liberating truth.
>
> I bow to the eternal Brahman, all-pervading and beyond all qualities.

You alone are the refuge; You alone are worthy of adoration.

You are truly the cause of the universe, the Creator, the Preserver, the Destroyer.

You are whole and beyond all thought,

Most frightening of all that is frightening, most terrible of all that is terrible,

The purifier of the pure, the goal of all creatures.

You are the Ruler of those in high places,

The Chief of chiefs, the Protector of protectors.

We meditate on You and sing hymns in Your praise.

We bow to You, the witness of the universe.

You are the vessel that takes one across the sea of life, the self-existent divinity, the refuge of all. We take shelter in You.

Thakur listens to the verse with folded hands. When it is over, he salutes devotedly. The devotees also salute.

Adhar arrives from Calcutta and salutes Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "We had fun today! Mahima Chakravarty is beginning to agree with us. Didn't you see his joy in the recitation of Hari's name?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

Mahimacharan is interested in the path of knowledge. Today he has chanted the name of Hari and even danced during the kirtan. Thakur is very happy about it.

It is almost evening. Most of the devotees bow to Thakur and take their leave, one by one.

Chapter IV

Worldliness[1] or non-worldliness[2] – Adhar's job – admiration of the worldly and taking a job under them

It is evening. The lamplighter has lit the lamps in the long southern verandah and the western semi-circular verandah. In Thakur's room the lamp has already been lit and incense burnt. Soon the moon rises. The temple courtyard, the garden path, the bank of the Ganges, the panchavati, and the tops of trees are all flooded with moonlight.

Thakur is sitting on his bed, repeating the name of the Divine Mother and meditating upon Her.

Adhar comes in and sits down. M. and Niranjan are also in the room. Thakur talks with Adhar.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, my dear, you have come now. How much kirtan and dancing we had! The kirtan was by Shyamdas, Ram's music teacher. But I didn't like it very much. I felt no desire to rise from my seat and dance. Later I came to know about him. Gopidas' substitute told me, 'He has as many mistresses as I have hair on my head.' (*All laugh.*) Did you get the job?"

Adhar is a deputy magistrate with a salary of three hundred rupees a month. He had applied for the vice chairmanship of the municipality of Calcutta, which paid a salary of one thousand

1 Pravritti: inclination to outer enjoyment.
2. Nivritti: inwardness of the mind.

rupees a month. Adhar had met many prominent people of Calcutta to get this job.

Non-worldliness is better – to adore worldly people of poor understanding to get a job

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and Niranjan*): "Hazra said, 'Please pray to the Divine Mother a little so Adhar can get the job.' Adhar also asked me. I prayed to the Mother a little: 'Mother, he comes to see You very often. If it's all right, let him get the job.' But I also said: 'Mother, what poor understanding he has! Instead of asking for knowledge and devotion, he asks You for things like this.'

(*To Adhar*) "Why do you associate so much with people of poor understanding? You have seen so much and heard so much! To read the seven sections[1] of the Ramayana and yet ask whose wife Sita was! Such-and-such Mallick is a man of low intelligence. He arranged for a service boat when I planned to go to Mahesh. And when we reached his home, he asked Hriday, 'Hriday, have you arranged for the carriage?'"

Adhar: "One has to do all this to run a household. You haven't forbidden me from doing that."

About the temple treasurer asking Thakur to sign a receipt for his monthly salary when his state of madness for God was over

Sri Ramakrishna: "Indeed, desirelessness is good, not worldliness. After that state of mine, I

1. Kanda.

was called by the treasurer to sign a receipt for my salary, like all the others. I told him, 'I can't do that. I'm not asking for any salary. Give it to someone else if you want.'

"I'm only the servant of the Lord. How can I be the servant of anyone else?

"Noticing that I would be late for my meals, Mallick engaged a brahmin cook for me – for only one rupee a month. I was embarrassed. I had to run to the kitchen as soon as he called for me. It would have been different if I could have gone there of my own will.

"Worshipping people of mean intelligence! Such things do happen in household life – and much more."

His earlier story – Thakur's prayer after his state of divine intoxication – contentment

"When I attained that state and saw how the affairs of the world are run, I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, please change the direction of my mind right now.' No more food from the beautiful lady. I cry after taking it. No more, no more of it."[1] (*All laugh.*)

Childhood story – about seeing the deputy magistrate, Ishwar Goshal, in Kamarpukur

"Go on with the job that you are doing now. People hanker after a salary of fifty or a hundred rupees. You are receiving three hundred. I saw a deputy magistrate in the village of Kamarpukur,

1. A Bengali remark about distasteful cooking by a sweet lady. Sri Ramakrishna was referring to not having to flatter rich people.

Ishwar Goshal. He wore a turban on his head. People trembled at his sight. I saw him when I was a child. Is being a deputy such a small thing, my dear?

"Go on serving him whom you are serving now. Service to one person soils the mind and you are seeking service under so many!"

Condemns service – Sambhu and Mathur's love and regard for money – Narendra as headmaster

"Once a woman felt attracted to a Muslim. She invited him to talk to her. The Muslim was a holy person. He said that he wanted to urinate and would go and get his piss pot. The woman said, 'You can do it here. I can give you a piss pot.' He said, 'That won't do. I will use the same piss pot to which I have already been exposed. I don't want to be immodest before a new piss pot.' Saying this, he left. The woman came to her senses. She understood that the piss pot meant a paramour."

Narendra has fallen on very difficult days after his father's death. He is looking for a job to feed and support his mother and brothers. For a few days he had worked as headmaster in Vidyasagar's Bowbazar school.

Adhar: "Well, would he accept a job?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, he would. He has his mother and brothers."

Adhar: "Well, Narendra can manage with fifty rupees. He can manage with a hundred, too. Will Narendra not try for a hundred?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Worldly people have great regard for wealth. They think there's nothing like money. Sambhu said, 'This is my desire – to place all this wealth at His feet when I depart.' Does God need worldly wealth? He wants spiritual knowledge, love, discrimination and dispassion.[1]

"When the jewelry was stolen from the temple, Mathur Babu said, 'O Bhagavan, could You not guard Your own jewelry? Goddess Hamseshwari protected hers so well!'

Difficult rules of conduct for sannyasins – Mathur's suggestion of gifting some land

"Mathur Babu said that he would transfer a piece of land to my name. I overheard it when I was in the Kali temple. Mathur Babu and Hriday were in consultation. I came out and said to Mathur Babu, 'Look, give up this idea. It would be very harmful to me.'"

Adhar: "There may not have been more than six or seven people like you since the beginning of creation!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why do you say that? There have surely been men of renunciation.[2] People come to know of them only when they have renounced their wealth. And there are others whom the world does not know. Are there not such people in western India (Punjab and United Provinces)?"

Adhar: "I know one such person in Calcutta, Devendra Tagore."

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1. Jnana, bhakti, viveka, vairagya.
2. Tyagis.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What are you saying! Who else has enjoyed pleasures of life the way he has? When I went to his house with Mathur Babu, I saw many small children. A physician had come and was writing out prescriptions. If the one who is a father of eight sons and some daughters will not meditate on God, who else will? The world condemns people who have enjoyed so much wealth but don't meditate on God."

Niranjan: "He repaid all the debts of Dwarkanath Tagore [his father]."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Stop this. Don't bother me anymore about it. Is he a real man who has the wherewithal and yet does not pay off the debts of his own father?

"But worldly people remain completely immersed in worldliness. Compared to them, he is a great deal better. They can learn from him.

"There is a tremendous difference between a householder devotee and a genuine all-renouncing devotee. A true sannyasin, a devotee of real renunciation, is like a bee. A bee sits nowhere else but on a flower. It drinks nothing but honey. The other – the householder devotee – is like a fly. It sits on sandesh as well as on a festering wound. He is sometimes in a fine spiritual mood and other times he is busy with 'lust and greed.'

"A real all-renouncing devotee is like a chatak bird. A chatak bird won't drink any water but rainwater when the star Svati is ascendant. The seven seas and the rivers are full of water, but it doesn't drink from them. A person of real

renunciation will not touch 'lust and greed,' nor will he keep them near him lest he become attached."

Chapter V

Chaitanya Deva, Sri Ramakrishna and name and fame

Adhar: "Chaitanya also enjoyed worldly pleasures."

Sri Ramakrishna (*surprised*): "What did he enjoy?"

Adhar: "Such a big pundit! What name and fame he enjoyed!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It may have been name and fame according to others – for him it was nothing.

"You have respect for me and so has Niranjan. It's just the same for me. I tell you the truth. It's not my desire to have a wealthy man under my control. Manomohan told me that Surendra said, 'It isn't correct that Rakhal should live with him. His family complained about it.' I said to him, 'Who is this Surendra? He has kept this carpet and pillow here and gives some money.'"

Adhar: "He gives ten rupees a month, doesn't he?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ten rupees meet expenses for two months. Some devotees live here. He gives for their support, the virtue accrues to him. What is it to me? I love Rakhal and Narendra. Do I derive any benefit from it?"

M.: "It is like a mother's love."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Even a mother does so much for her child, hoping that he will provide for her after getting a job. I love them because I see them as living Narayana – I don't just say this."

God takes on the burden of an all-renouncing devotee – 'who, precluding all else, meditates on Me'[1]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Adhar*): "Listen. When you light a lamp, there is no scarcity of moths. When you realize God, He provides everything. There is no dearth of anything. When He resides in the heart, many people arrive to serve.

"A young sannyasin went to beg alms at a householder's home. He was a sannyasin from birth. He knew nothing about the world. A young woman came to the door to offer him alms. The sannyasin asked, 'Mother, does this girl have an abscess on her chest?' The mother of the girl said, 'No, my child. She will bear an infant. God has given her breasts, so that the baby can drink milk from them.' The sannyasin then said, 'Why do I need to worry then? Why should I beg for alms? He who has created me will provide me with food.'

"Listen, she who has given up her all for the sake of her paramour can say, 'O rascal, I'll sit on your chest and eat.'"

Story of Totapuri – king's service to sadhus – Thakur meets the leader of Nanak's followers in their math near the Durga Temple in Kashi, in 1868

"The Naked One (Totapuri) told me that a king served food to sadhus using gold plates and

1. ananyāścintayanto, Bhagavad Gita 9:22.

tumblers. I saw in Kashi what reverence the head of the math was given. A number of very rich and wealthy Hindustani men stood there with folded hands, saying, 'At your command.'

"The right kind of sadhu, a true holy man, does not want gold plates, nor reverence. But God does not let him lack anything. He provides for everything that is necessary for realizing Him. (*Everybody keeps silent.*)

"You are a magistrate. What can I tell you? Do what you think is right. I am a fool."

Adhar (*laughing, to the devotees*): "He is examining me."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to the devotees*): "Dispassion[1] is better. Just see, I didn't sign [for receiving a salary]. God indeed is the Reality, everything else is unreal."

Hazra comes in and sits on the floor near the devotees. Hazra sometimes repeats, "So 'ham, so 'ham (I am He)." He says to Latu and other devotees, "What is the use in making offerings to God in worship – giving His own thing back to Him? One day he said the same to Narendra."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hazra*): "I explained to Latu. Who is it the devotee worships?"

Hazra: "The devotee calls upon his own self."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That is a very elevated idea. Vrindavalli said to King Bali, 'What wealth can you give to Brahman?'

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1. Nivritti.

"All spiritual practices, all chanting of His name and glories are done to realize what you are saying.

"When you see your Self within yourself you have attained the goal. It is to attain this that all spiritual practices are undertaken. The body is also to carry out spiritual practice. As long as a gold image is not cast, one needs a clay mould. When the image is made, the clay mould is thrown away. One can give up the body after God-realization.

"He is not only within – He is both within and without. The Divine Mother showed me in the Kali Temple that everything is filled with divine consciousness. The Divine Mother Herself has become everything – the deity, myself, the worship vessels,[1] the door sill, the marble floor. All is consciousness.

"It is to experience this that one calls upon Him, carries out spiritual practices – chanting His name and glories, and so on. It is for this that one practices devotion to God. These people (Latu and others) are like this – they have not yet reached such a high state. They practice love of God. Don't say 'I am He' (So 'ham) and such things to them."

The compassionate Gurudeva, Sri Ramakrishna, is protecting the devotees like a mother bird sheltering its young ones under its wings.

Adhar and Niranjan go to the verandah for refreshments, then they return. M. is sitting on the floor near Thakur.

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1. Kosha, kushi, etc.

A Brahmo boy with four university degrees – discussing and reasoning with him

Adhar (*smiling*): "We talked so much, but he (M.) didn't say even one word."

Sri Ramakrishna: "A boy of Keshab's group with four university degrees (named Varda?) laughed when he saw people arguing with me. 'What?' he said, 'To reason even with him!' I saw him again at one of Keshab's gatherings. Somehow his appearance had changed."

Ram Chakravarty, the priest of Vishnu temple, enters the room. Thakur says, "Look here, Ram. Did you talk about sugar candy with Dayal? No, there is no need for it. There have already been many discussions."

Thakur's evening meal – 'I can't eat food offered by everybody'

Thakur's evening meal is the prasad from Mother Kali – one or two luchis and a little farina pudding. He is seated on the floor to eat. M. is sitting near him. Latu is also in the room. The devotees have brought some sandesh and other sweets. Touching one piece of sandesh with his hand, Thakur says to Latu, "What rascal has brought this sandesh?" He drops it from the plate of pudding. (*To M. and Latu*) I know about it all. It was brought by one of the boys of the Anand Chatterji family, the one who visits the Ghoshpara woman."

Latu: "Shall I give you this sweet?"[1]

1. Gaja.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Did Kishori bring it?"

Latu: "Will it be agreeable to you?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Yes."

M. is an English-educated man. Thakur says to him, "I can't eat food offered by everybody. Do you believe this?"

M.: "Sir, I shall gradually have to believe in everything."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes."

Thakur goes to the western verandah to wash his hands. M. pours water on them.

It is winter. As the moon rises, the clear sky and the water of the Ganges begin to sparkle. It is ebb tide and the Ganges is flowing south. Washing his face, Thakur says to M., "So will you give a rupee to Narayan?"

M.: "Yes, of course. Would I not?"

Section XIX

Thakur at Dakshineswar Temple with Narendra and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Go beyond both knowledge and ignorance – dry knowledge of Shashadhar

Sri Ramakrishna is resting in his room at the Dakshineswar temple after his midday meal. Devotees are with him. Narendra, Bhavanath, and other devotees have come today from Calcutta. The two Mukherji brothers, Jnan Babu, the younger Gopal, the elder Kali, and others have also arrived. Three devotees from Konnagar have come. There is news that Rakhal, who is with Balaram in holy Vrindavan, has suffered a bout of fever. Today is Sunday, 14 September 1884, 30th Bhadra, 1291 (B.Y.), the tenth day of the dark fortnight of the lunar month..

Narendra is very worried about his mother and brothers after the death of his father. He is preparing for a law examination.

Jnan Babu has received four university degrees and is a government official. He arrives between ten and eleven o'clock.

Sri Ramakrishna (*seeing Jnan Babu*): "Well, knowledge [a play on Jnan's name] has suddenly appeared!"

Jnan (*smiling*): "Sir, knowledge appears only with great good fortune."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Why, you are jnana. Why then are you in ajnana [ignorance]? Oh,

I understand, where there is knowledge, there is also ignorance. Rishi Vasishtha, though endowed with such knowledge, wept at the death of his sons. So go beyond knowledge and ignorance. The thorn of ignorance has pierced your foot. To take it out, you need the thorn of knowledge. After you have pulled it out, throw away both thorns."

The unattached householder – Thakur observes the work of the women carpenter women in his native village

"A man of knowledge says that worldly life is a veil of deception. He who is beyond both knowledge and ignorance calls it a mart of joy. He sees that God Himself has become the world and its living beings, and that He has become the twenty-four cosmic principles.

"One can live in the world after attaining God. Then one can live unattached. I have seen the carpenter women in my native village. They pound flattened rice with a pestle connected to a treadle. They push the paddy with one hand and hold a suckling child with the other. At the same time they bargain with a buyer, 'You owe me two annas. You must pay before you leave.' But seventy-five percent of their mind is on their hand, lest it should be crushed by the falling pestle.

"You should fix seventy-five percent of your mind on God and work with twenty-five percent."

Sri Ramakrishna now talks to the devotees about Pundit Shashadhar: "I saw him as one-tracked – he's only interested in dry knowledge and reasoning.

"Only that person who has matured in knowledge and has ripened his love for God, having reached the Absolute, can also dwell in the relative and then again ascend from the relative to the Absolute.

"Narada and other saints lived with love for God after attaining the knowledge of Brahman. This is called vijnana.

"Just dry reasoning! It's like a firework's rocket which shoots up into the air with a noise but falls down with a thud after sparkling momentarily. But the knowledge of Narada and Sukadeva is like a superior rocket that sparkles for some time, then goes out, but again sparkles with a new spray. Narada, Sukadeva, and others like them have intense love[1] for God. Ecstatic love is the rope for getting hold of Sat-chit-ananda."

Sri Ramakrishna at the foot of the bakul tree – becomes absorbed in ecstasy in the jhautala

After his midday meal, Sri Ramakrishna rests a while.

A few devotees are sitting on a bench under the bakul tree and talking – Bhavanath, the two Mukherji brothers, M., the younger Gopal, Hazra, and some others. Thakur is going to the jhautala. On his way there, he sits with the devotees for some time.

Hazra (*to the younger Gopal*): "Prepare a smoke for him."

1. Prema.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "You want it. That's why you ask for it." (*They all laugh*.)

Mukherji (*to Hazra*): "You have learnt a lot living with him."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "No, he has been like this since childhood!" (*All laugh*.)

The devotees watch Thakur return from the jhautala. He is in ecstasy, walking like he's drunk. When he enters his room, he returns to normal consciousness.

Chapter II

Thakur is worried about Narayan – devotees from Konnagar – Thakur in samadhi – Narendra sings

Many devotees have assembled in Thakur's room. Among the devotees from Konnagar there is a newcomer, a sadhaka who looks over fifty years old. He seems to be very proud of his scholarship. When he talks, he says, "Was there no moon before the churning of the ocean? Who will explain this?"

M. (*laughing*): "When there was no universe, where did the Mother get Her garland of skulls?"

The Sadhaka (*irritated*): "That's different."

Standing in the middle of the room, Thakur suddenly says to M., "Did he come – Narayan?" Narendra is talking with Hazra and some others on the verandah. A murmur from their discussion can be heard in Thakur's room.

Sri Ramakrishna: "He (Narendra) can talk a lot! But now he's very worried about his family at home."

M.: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Wasn't he saying a while ago that he'd consider the trials of life as good for him? Didn't he?"

M.: "Sir, he has great strength of mind."

The elder Kali: "In what respect is he less strong?" Thakur is sitting.

A devotee from Konnagar says to him, "Sir, he (the sadhaka) has come to see you. He has something to ask."

The sadhaka is sitting with his body and head erect.

Sadhaka: "Sir, what is the way?"

Way to see God – faith in the words of the guru – when does one internalize the scriptures?

Sri Ramakrishna: "Have faith in the words of the guru. One attains God by following his words step by step. The way to reach one object is by holding the end of a thread."

Sadhaka: "Can one see God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He is beyond the worldly intellect. You cannot attain Him if there is the least trace of attachment for 'lust and greed.' But He is visible to the pure intellect and pure mind – that intellect and mind which do not have the least trace

of attachment. Pure mind, pure intellect, pure Atman are one and the same."

Sadhaka: "But the scripture says, 'From where words turn back along with the mind, unable to comprehend.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Leave the scriptures out of it. Without practicing spiritual disciplines, you cannot understand the true meaning of the scriptures. What use is it to shout, 'Hemp, hemp?' Scholars quote verses from the scriptures, but what use is that? You feel no intoxication by just rubbing hemp on your body. You have to swallow it.

"What use is it to just repeat that there is butter in milk? You have to curdle the milk and then churn it. Only then do you get butter."

Sadhaka: "Churning the butter – these words are in the scriptures."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What good will it do you just to speak or listen to the words of the scriptures? You have to internalize them. The almanac says it's going to rain a certain amount, but you don't get even a drop by squeezing the almanac."

Sadhaka: "Churning butter – have you done it?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Don't bother about what I have and haven't done. It's very difficult to make a person understand these things. If someone asks, 'What does ghee taste like?' the only reply is, 'Sir, ghee tastes just like ghee.'

"You have to keep the company of the holy to understand these things. You have to live with an

Ayurvedic physician[1] to know which pulse beat indicates phlegm, which bile, and which wind.[2]"

Sadhaka: "Some people become irritated living with others."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That comes after gaining knowledge, after realizing God. Doesn't a beginner need the company of the holy?"

The sadhaka keeps silent.

Sadhaka (*after a while, excitedly*): "Please tell me if you have known Him, whether you have gained His direct vision or experienced Him. Please tell me if you'd like to, but don't if you don't want to."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling a little*): "What can I say? One can only give a hint of what one feels."

Sadhaka: "Please tell us about that."

Narendra is going to sing. He says, "No one has brought a pakhavaj."

The younger Gopal: "Mahima (Mahimacharan) has one."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, there is no need to bring anything of his."

A devotee from Konnagar first sings a song in Dhrupada style.[3]

While the singing goes on, Thakur from time to time notes the sadhaka's different moods. The

1. Vaidya.
2. Kapha, pitta and vayu.
3. A style of North Indian classical music.

singer is having an intense argument with Narendra about singing and music.

Sadhaka (*to the singer*): "You are no less strong in argumentation! What is the use of such a discussion?"

Another person has joined in the discussion. Referring to him, Thakur says to the sadhaka, "But you haven't scolded him, too."

Sri Ramakrishna says to the devotees of Konnagar, "It appears that even you are not on good terms with him."

Narendra sings:

Will my days just pass in vain, O Lord?

Day and night my eyes are on the path of hope.[1]

The sadhaka closes his eyes in meditation as he listens to the song. Thakur is seated on his cot facing south. It is between three and four o'clock. From the west the sun falls on the sadhaka's body. Thakur quickly takes an umbrella and positions it to shade him.

Narendra sings:

How can I call on You with this stained and soiled mind?

Can a straw survive a flaming fire?

You are like that flaming fire, the source of all good,

And I, the sinner, am like a straw. How can I worship You?

I hear that by the glory of Your name the worst of sinners have been saved.

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1. For the complete song refer to Volume III, Appendix, Chapter 1.

But, alas, my heart trembles when I recite Your holy Name.

My life passes by in the pursuit of habitual wrong-doing.

How can I find shelter in Your holy way?

Pray save this wretch with Your compassionate name,

Pull me up by the hair of my head; give me shelter at Your feet.

Chapter III

Instruction to Narendra and others – Vedas and Vedanta give only a faint idea

Narendra sings:

Sweet is Your name, O refuge of the lowly, raining like nectar in our ears and comforting us, O beloved of our souls!

The treasure of Your name is the abode of immortality. He who chants Your name becomes immortal.

When the nectar of Your name touches our ears, it erases in that instant the deep anguish of our hearts.

The sweet music of Your name fills the heart with sweetness. O Master of our hearts, and Soul of our souls!

As Narendra sings, "The sweet music of Your name fills the heart with sweetness," Thakur goes into samadhi. Immediately his fingers, and particularly his thumbs, become stiff. The devotees of Konnagar have never witnessed samadhi. Noticing that Thakur is silent, they prepare to leave.

Bhavanath: "Please sit down. He is in the state of samadhi."

The devotees from Konnagar sit again. Narendra sings:

I have made a seat for You in my heart, striving day and night.

O Lord of the Universe, in your mercy will you not enter there?

In ecstasy, Thakur comes down and sits on the floor beside Narendra.

In the firmament of wisdom, the moon of divine love rises full.

What a joyous sea of love has swelled up!

Victory to the Compassionate One! Victory to Him, the Compassionate One.[1]

When he hears the words, "Victory to the Compassionate One," he stands and again goes into samadhi.

After a fairly long time, Sri Ramakrishna returns somewhat to his normal state and sits down again on a mat on the floor. Narendra has finished the song. He has put the tanpura away. Still in ecstasy, Thakur says, "What is this, Mother? Please tell me. Churn the butter and place it at their mouths. They won't throw bait into the pond. Nor will they sit with a fishing rod. Someone has to catch the fish for them and give it to them. What a situation! I won't listen to any more reasoning. The rascals are forcing reason on me! What a situation! I will shake it off."

"God is beyond the Vedas and their rituals. Can you realize God by studying the Vedas and the

1. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section I, Chapter II.

Vedanta? (*To Narendra*) Do you understand? The Vedas only give a faint idea of God."

Narendra again asks for the tanpura. Thakur says, "I will sing now." He is still in an ecstatic mood. He sings:

> This is the grief that weighs on my heart: though You, my Mother, are here and I am wide awake, thieves of passion rob my house.[1]

"Mother, why do You make me reason?" Again Thakur sings :

> Once for all, this time, I have thoroughly understood.
>
> From one who knows it well, I have learned the secret of contemplation, from one who came from a realm where there is no night.
>
> And now I can distinguish day from night no longer; rituals and devotions have all grown profitless for me.
>
> I've shaken off my sleep; how can I fall into slumber again? For I am wide awake in the sleeplessness of union.
>
> O Divine Mother, made one with you at last, my slumber I have lulled asleep forevermore.

Thakur says, "I am conscious." But he is still in an ecstatic mood. He sings again:

> I drink no ordinary wine, but the nectar of everlasting bliss, as I repeat "Jai Kali – to Kali, victory!"
>
> Seeing me drunk on this wine of the mind, by drunkards am I taken for a drunk.[2]

Thakur says, "Mother, I won't listen to discussions anymore."

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1. For the complete song refer to Volume I, Section XX, Chapter V.
2. For the complete song refer to Section XXX, Chapter II.

Narendra sings:

O Mother, make me mad with Your love.

What need have I for knowledge or reason?

With the wine of Your love make me drunk,

You who steal the hearts of Your devotees!

Drown me in the ocean of Your love.

Thakur smiles a little when he says, "O Mother, make me mad with Your love. You cannot attain Her by Your knowledge or reason, by discussing scripture."

He is happy to hear the Dhrupada musical airs by the singer from Konnagar. He says to him humbly, "Brother, please sing a song about the All-Blissful Mother."

Musician: "Sir, please excuse me from doing that."

Sri Ramakrishna (*folding his hands and bowing*): "No, my dear. Just one song. I can compel you."

Saying this, he sings a song referring to [gopi] Vrinda's speech from Govinda Adhikari's musical play:

Radha can surely speak out!

She has kept awake for Krishna.

She has kept awake throughout the night,

And has good reason to be piqued.

"My dear sir, you are the son of the All-Blissful Mother. She resides in every being. I shall certainly enforce my demand. A peasant said to his guru, 'I

will get the mantra from you by beating if necessary.'"

Singer (*smiling*): "Beating with a shoe!"

Sri Ramakrishna (*bowing as to the revered guru, and smiling*): "Not that far."

Then he adds, again abstracted in ecstasy, "The beginner, the aspirant, the perfect, and the perfect among the perfect! Are you perfect, or perfect of the perfect? Well, do sing."

The singer plays the notes of the melody, "Manvaran."

Enjoying the bliss of Shabda Brahman (the word as Brahman) – 'Mother, is it You or me?'

Sri Ramakrishna (*listening to the notes of melody*): "My dear sir, even this gives me joy."

The song has ended. The devotees from Konnagar salute Sri Ramakrishna and leave. The sadhaka salutes and then says with folded hands, "Holy sir,[1] may I leave?" Thakur is still absorbed in ecstasy and talking to the Divine Mother, "Mother, You or I? Do I do anything? No, no. You.

"You heard the discussion – or was it I who heard it? No, not me. It was You who heard it."

His earlier story – a sadhu teaches Thakur – a sadhu with the quality of tamas

Thakur has returned to the normal state of consciousness. He is talking to Narendra, Bhavanath, the two Mukherji brothers, and some

1. Gosain.

other devotees. The conversation turns to the sadhaka.

Bhavanath (*smiling*): "What kind of a man is he?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He is a tamasic devotee."

Bhavanath: "He can quote any number of Sanskrit verses."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Once I said to someone, 'So and so is a rajasic sadhu. Why give him food and other provisions?' Another sadhu taught me not to say such things. He said, 'There are three kinds of sadhus: sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic.' Since that day, I respect sadhus of all kinds."

Narendra (*smiling*): "What? Like the elephant is Narayana, all are Narayana?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "God Himself is playing the game as both knowledge and ignorance.[1] I bow to both of them. The Chandi says, 'She is Lakshmi [good fortune] in the house of the blessed, and misfortune personified[2] in the house of the unfortunate.' (*To Bhavanath*) Is this in the Vishnu Purana?"

Bhavanath (*smiling*): "I don't know about that, sir. The devotees from Konnagar didn't understand your samadhi and got up to leave."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Then who said, 'Please stay seated'?"

Bhavanath (*smiling*): "I did."

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1. Vidya and avidya.
2. Alakshmi.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Child, you are as good in gathering people as in making them leave."

Narendra's argument with the singer is now the topic of conversation.

Doctrine of non-resistance and Sri Ramakrishna – Thakur teaches Narendra – the tamas of sattva – the great importance of God's name

Mukherji: "Narendra didn't leave him alone."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, he didn't. One must have such grit. It is called the tamas of sattva. Should you listen to everything that people say? Should you let a prostitute do what she likes? Should you have to listen to what the prostitute says? One time Radha became sullen. A gopi friend said, 'Radha has become proud.' Brinda replied, 'Whose pride is it? It is His pride – she is proud with Krishna's pride.'"

Now the conversation turns to the great importance of chanting God's name.

Bhavanath: "I feel such relief by chanting the name of Hari."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is Hari indeed who rids us of sins.[1] Hari removes the three afflictions of the world.[2]

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1. A name of Vishnu or His incarnation, Krishna, applied to God in personal form.
2. The three afflictions are *adhidaivika*, misfortunes caused by natural disasters or the forces of nature; *adhibhautika*, misfortunes caused by other livings beings, i.e. war, physical or verbal assault, attacks of animals, snake bites, and so on; *adhyatmika*, misfortunes arising from the harm we do ourselves by mental anguish, addictions, and self-destructive behavior.

"And Chaitanya Deva propagated the name of Hari, so it must be good. Look, what a scholar Chaitanya Deva was! Besides, he was an incarnation of God. Since he preached the name, it must certainly be good. (*Laughing*) Once some peasants were invited to a feast. They were asked, 'Would you like some hog plum pickles?' They replied, 'If the gentlemen have eaten it, give it to us too.' If they ate it, it most certainly must be good." (*Everybody laughs.*)

Thakur's desire to meet Shivanath – Mahendra's proposal to go on pilgrimage

Thakur feels a desire to see Shivanath (Shastri). He says to the Mukherji brothers: "I would like to go to see Shivanath. If I go in your carriage, there won't be the need to hire one."

Mukherji: "As you please. Let's decide on a date."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Well, would he like for me to visit? Brahmos criticize those who believe in God with form."

Mahendra Mukherji tells Thakur about wanting to go on pilgrimage.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What do you mean, my dear? The plant of love has not yet sprouted and you are leaving? Let the plant grow and develop into a tree and bear fruit. We were having a nice conversation."

Mahendra: "I feel that I should visit holy places. I'll return soon."

Chapter IV

Narendra's love and devotion for God – Thakur in the mood of Gauranga at Jadu Mallick's garden – with devotees

It is afternoon, about five o'clock. Thakur gets up from his seat. Devotees are strolling in the garden. Many of them will soon take their leave.

Thakur talks with Hazra on the northern verandah. These days Narendra often visits Annada, the eldest son of the Guhas.

Hazra: "I hear that Annada, Guha's son, is practicing difficult austerities. He lives on very little food, eating rice only once every four days."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Oh, really? Who knows through what practice one may meet the Lord."

Hazra: "Narendra sang an agamani[1] song."

Sri Ramakrishna (*eagerly*): "How was it?"

Kishori is standing nearby. Thakur says, "Are you all right?"

Thakur is on the western circular verandah. It is winter. He is putting on a flannel shirt dyed ochre. At the same time he asks Narendra, "Did you sing the agamani?" Going down from the semi-circular verandah, he walks to the embankment of the Ganges with Narendra. M. is with them.

Narendra sings:

> Tell me, my daughter Uma, how you fared in the stranger's house.

1. A class of songs welcoming the Divine Mother, Uma, Shiva's wife, to her father's house.

The stories people tell! My heart is rent by grief.

His body smeared with ashes from the funeral pyre,

My son-in-law roams about, filled with delight!

Do you, like him, also rub your golden skin with ash?

How can a mother bear her son-in-law to beg from door to door?

This time when he comes to fetch you again, I shall say, "Uma is not here."

Thakur stands and listens to the song. He goes into an ecstatic mood standing there.

There is still a little daylight. The sun is low on the western horizon. Thakur is absorbed in ecstasy. On one side of him is the Ganges flowing north; the flood tide came some time ago. Behind him is a flower garden. And to the right the nahabat and the panchavati can be seen. Narendra stands close to him as he sings.

Now twilight has come. Narendra and other devotees salute Thakur and leave. Thakur returns to his room, recites the name of the Divine Mother, and meditates on Her.

Today Jadu Mallick has come to the adjoining garden house. He often sends word to Thakur to visit him when he is there. Today a messenger from him has come. Thakur will go. Adhar Sen, having come from Calcutta, salutes Thakur.

Thakur in Jadu Mallick's garden with devotees –in Gauranga's feelings

Thakur is about to go visit Jadu Mallick's garden. He says to Latu, "Light the lantern. Let's go."

He is going alone with Latu, but M. is present.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.)*: "Why haven't you brought Narayan with you?"

M.: "May I accompany you?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you want to go? Adhar and some others are there. All right, come along."

The Mukherji brothers were standing on the path. Thakur says to M., "Do they want to accompany us?" (*To the Mukherji brothers*) "That's nice. Come on. Then we can return quickly."

Conversation with Jadu about Chaitanya's life – about Adhar's work

Thakur goes to Jadu Mallick's parlour, a well furnished room. Lamps are shedding light in the room and on the verandah. Jadu is sitting with a couple of friends playing with some little boys. One of the kitchen help is awaiting orders. Another is fanning the company. Smiling, Jadu greets Thakur, still sitting. He acts with Thakur as if he is an old acquaintance.

Jadu is a devotee of Gauranga. He has already seen the performance about Chaitanya's life at the Star Theatre. He tells Thakur, "A new play of Chaitanya's life is being enacted. It is wonderful."

Thakur listens to the account of the play with joy and plays with one of Jadu's little sons, holding his hand. M. and the Mukherji brothers are sitting beside him.

Adhar Sen was trying to get the job of Vice Chairman of the municipal committee of Calcutta.

This post carried a salary of a thousand rupees a month. Adhar is a deputy magistrate, with a salary of three hundred rupees a month. He is thirty years old.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Jadu*): "Well, Adhar hasn't been successful in getting that job."

Jadu and his friends say, "He is still young."

After a short time Jadu says, "Please chant His name a little."

Thakur begins singing, depicting Gauranga's mood.

He sings:

My Gaur is dancing,

Dancing with the devotees to the kirtan in Srivas's courtyard.[1]

He sings:

My Gaur is a jewel of a man.

And he sings again:

Gauranga Deva casts a glance toward Vrindavan,

And from his eyes flow tears of ecstasy.

What is this, if not divine rapture?

Gauranga is an ocean of bliss.

In ecstasy he laughs, weeps, dances, and sings.

Every wooded grove he sees as Vrindavan, and the ocean as the Jamuna.

He places his head on his own feet,

For he is Gaur without, but Sri Krishna within.

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1. For the complete song refer to Section XV, Chapter V.

And then he sings:

Why has my body become fair of complexion? Tell me, what has happened?

O friend, it is not the hour of dawn. Why has it taken on this hue before its time,

Before the time of the day's brightening?

The play of the Lord of the Dwaparayuga has not yet come to a close.[1]

Tell me, why has all this happened?

Wherever I cast my glance, the cuckoo and the peacock brightly gleam.

What has happened? Why do I see everything filled with golden light?

Perhaps Radha has reached Mathura, and that is why this body shines golden.

Radha was like a weevil,[2] so she has given her complexion to it. The limb that was dark has suddenly become golden.

Have I become Radha by thinking of her? What has happened?

Does Radharani bestow her radiant complexion on him who does not recite the Radha mantra?

I cannot tell, brother, whether I am in Mathura or Navadvip.

Mahadeva has not yet become advaita.

Why has my body turned fair-complexioned?

Balaram, the elder brother, has not yet become Nitai nor Vishakha Ramananda.

Brahma has also not become Haridas, nor Narada Srivasa, or Mother Yashoda Shachi.

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1. Dwaparayuga: the second of the four cosmic ages (yugas).
2. Kumro poka, an insect that bores.

Why have I alone taken on this fair complexion, when Balai, the elder brother, has not become Nitai?

I think I have come to Mathura and that is why my body has become golden-hued.

I have become golden-hued though father Nanda has not yet become Jagannath, nor has Radhika become Gadadhar.

Why has my body become golden-hued?

Chapter V

Thakur's worry for Rakhal – Jadu Mallick – Bholanath testifies

As the song ends, the Mukherji brothers rise. Thakur also rises, though he is absorbed in an ecstatic mood. He comes to the verandah of the room and goes into deep samadhi as he stands there. A number of lamps have been lit on the verandah. The gate keeper of the garden is a devotee who sometimes invites Thakur to his house for a meal. While Thakur is still standing in samadhi, the gate keeper comes and fans him with a big fan.

Ratan, the garden manager, comes and bows to Thakur.

Thakur returns to a normal state. He says, "Narayana, Narayana," and then talks to him.

Thakur goes to the main gate of the temple accompanied by the devotees. The Mukherji brothers have been waiting there for him.

In the meantime Adhar has been looking for Thakur.

Mukherji (*laughing*): "Mahendra Babu [M.] has played truant to come here."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing, to Mukherji*): "Please keep regular contact with him and talk with him."

Priya Mukherji (smiling): "He is going to be our teacher now."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The nature of a hemp smoker is that he is filled with joy to see another hemp smoker. He does not even talk to a good gentleman, but if a wandering hemp smoker comes, he may embrace him." (*All laugh*.)

Thakur proceeds west to his room by the garden path. On the way, he says, "Jadu is a great Hindu. He quotes many tales from the Bhagavata."

Mani comes to the Kali Temple, salutes, and takes some holy water.[1] Thakur arrives. They will both visit the Divine Mother.

It is around 9 p.m. The Mukherji brothers salute Thakur and leave. Adhar and M. are sitting on the floor. Thakur talks to Adhar about Rakhal.

Rakhal is in Vrindavan with Balaram. News about him had come by letter, saying that he was sick. Two or three days ago Thakur had become so worried to hear of his illness that he had cried like a child at the time of his midday meal, asking Hazra, "What is going to happen?" Adhar had written a registered letter to Rakhal but even the receipt of the letter has not yet been acknowledged.

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1. Charanamrita.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Narayan got a letter but you have not received any reply to yours."

Adhar: "No sir, I haven't received a reply yet."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And he has written to M. as well."

They begin to talk about Thakur's seeing the *Chaitanya Lila.*

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing, to the devotees*): "Jadu said, 'You can see it nicely from a one-rupee seat. That's cheap!'

"Once there was talk about taking us to Panihati. Jadu said that we might take a country boat that carries a crowd of passengers. (*All laugh.*)

"He used to listen a little to spiritual talk. One devotee used to visit him quite frequently. But he is no longer seen. He always seems to have so many flatterers with him – they have misled him.

"He is very calculating. As soon as I arrive at his house, he asks, 'How much is the carriage fare?' I tell him, 'You don't have to bother about it. Just pay two and a half rupees.' Then he is silent and pays exactly two and a half rupees." (*All laugh.*)

A latrine has been built to the south of the temple. Because of it, a dispute with Jadu Mallick and the Temple authorities arose. Jadu's garden is close to it.

Bholanath, the garden clerk, has given a deposition before a judge. Perhaps because of it, he has become fearful, and he told Thakur about it. Thakur had replied, "Adhar is a deputy magistrate.

I'll ask him when he comes." Ram Chakravarty had brought Bholanath to Thakur and explained the whole matter to him, "Bholanath is afraid after giving deposition to the judge."

Thakur is worried and sits up. He asks for the whole case to be explained to Adhar. After Adhar has heard everything, he says, "There is nothing to it – just a little inconvenience." It helped rid Thakur of a deep worry.

It is dark. Adhar is about to leave. He offers his salutations.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Bring Narayan with you."

Section XX

Thakur at Dakshineswar with Mahendra, Rakhal, Radhika Goswami, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Advice to Mahendra and others – Captain's devotion to God and service to his parents

Sri Ramakrishna is in his room at the Kali temple in Dakshineswar with the devotees. It is autumn, Friday, 19 September 1884, the 4th of Ashwin, 1291 B.Y. The time is two o'clock. It is the amavasya[1] of the month of Bhadra, mahalaya.[2] Mahendra Mukherji and his brother Priya Mukherji, M., Baburam, Harish, Kishori, and Latu are there. Some are seated on the floor and the others either stand or move about the room. Hazra is sitting in the verandah. Rakhal is in Vrindavan with Balaram.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahendra and other devotees*): "I went to Captain's house in Calcutta. It was late at night when I returned.

"What a good nature Captain has! What love for God! He wears a short cloth[3] when he performs the arati – once with an earthen lamp with three wicks and then with a lamp with one light. Finally he performs arati with camphor.

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1. New moon day.
2. The sacred day of invocation of Mother Durga prior to Her worship.
3. Short dhoti.

"He doesn't speak when he performs worship. He motioned for me to take a seat.

"While he worships, his eyes show great emotion, red and swollen as if a wasp has stung them.

"He can't sing, but he chants beautifully.

"In the presence of his mother, he sits below her, on the floor.

"His father was an officer[1] in the British army. On the battlefield, he would hold a gun in one hand and worship Shiva with the other. His servant made clay images of Shiva for him. He wouldn't even drink water before worshiping. He was paid six thousand rupees a year.

"Captain sends his mother to Kashi now and then. Twelve or thirteen people serve her there. It is a big expense. Captain knows Vedanta, the Gita, and the Bhagavata by heart.

"He says, 'The gentlemen in Calcutta conduct themselves like malechhas.'[2]

"In his early years, he practiced Hatha Yoga. That's why he strokes my head when I'm in samadhi or ecstasy.

"His wife has another deity – Gopala. This time I didn't find her so miserly. She also knows the Gita and other scriptures. What devotion they have! Whenever I sit for meals, they pour water on my hands to wash them. They even give me a wooden toothpick.

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1. Subadar; officer in a company of native Indian soldiers.
2. Non-Hindus; a term of deprecation.

"They made a goat curry. Captain said, 'It stays good for fifteen days.' But his wife said, 'No, no. It's only good for seven days.' It was tasty. She served a little of some other dishes. Since I eat more than they do these days, she served me more.

"After eating, Captain or his wife fan me."

Jung Bahadur's sons accompany Captain to see Thakur in 1875-76 – an unmarried Nepali girl sings the *Gita Govinda* – 'I am a handmaid of God'

"They have great love for God. They show great reverence for sadhus. The people of western India (Punjab and Uttar Pradesh) have great devotion for sadhus. Jung Bahadur's sons and a nephew came here. They didn't wear their English trousers. They were somewhat in awe.

"Once a girl from his country came with Captain. She was a great devotee and hadn't married. She could sing the *Gita Govinda* from memory. Dwarika Babu[1] and his family came to hear her sing. I said, 'They want to hear you. They are good people.' While she was singing the *Gita Govinda*, Dwarika Babu began to wipe tears from his eyes. When asked why she had not married, she said, 'I am a handmaid of God. Whom else can I serve now?' Everybody respects her very much as a goddess, as the scriptures direct.

(*To Mahendra and others*) "Do you feel benefited by coming here? I would be quite pleased to hear

1. Dwarika Babu, Mathur's eldest son, died in 1877 (Pausha, 1284 B.Y.) at the age of 40. Captain first came in 1875-76, so this performance of *Gita Govinda* probably took place between 1875 and 1877.

that it helps. (*To M.*) Why do people come here? I am not much of a scholar."

M.: "Sir, when Krishna himself became cows and cowherd boys (after the original ones were abducted by Brahma), their mothers stopped going to Yashoda after they found the new cowherd boys. Even the cows followed the calves, bellowing when they heard them."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What does that mean?"

M.: "That the Lord Himself had become everything – such an attraction was generated. The mind is attracted by the presence of God."

Explanation of Krishna's sport – love of the gopis – significance of stealing their clothes

Sri Ramakrishna: "This is the attraction of Yogamaya. She casts a spell. Radhika disguised herself as Subol[1] with a calf in her arms, she was so afraid of Jatila (her sister-in-law). Jatila blessed her. When one takes refuge in Yogamaya, then even a Jatila blesses.

"The whole sport of Lord Hari is played out with the help of Yogamaya.

"The gopis, though married, felt great love for Krishna. They were madly in love with him – a woman doesn't feel so much love for her husband. If someone says to her, 'Look, your husband has come,' she replies, 'Let him. He can help himself to something to eat.' But if she hears that it is another man who is handsome and a master of wit, she will

1. Krishna's cowherd companion.

run to see him and peep at him from behind a screen.

"If the gopis had not seen him, how could their minds feel such attraction for him? This attraction is possible even by hearing about him. 'My mind is absorbed with him just by hearing his name, even without knowing him.'"

A devotee: "Sir, what is the meaning of the theft of the gopis' clothes?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The eight fetters – the gopis were rid of all the fetters except the feeling of shame. So he snapped even that bondage. All bondages are removed when one realizes God."

He who has fallen from yoga attains God after his desire for sense enjoyments is over

(*To Mahendra Mukherji and other devotees*) "Not everybody is attracted to God. There has to be a special receptivity. You have to have the right samskaras to feel such attraction. If that were not so, why should you be the only one to come here out of so many residents of Baghbazar? The ones without good tendencies don't come. The Malaya breeze turns every tree into sandalwood. But the shimul, the ashwattha, the banyan, and some others are not transformed.

"You don't lack money. When a person falls from yoga, he takes birth in a prosperous family. This enables him to renew his spiritual practices for the realization of God."

Mahendra Mukherji: "Why does a person fall from yoga?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Perhaps while contemplating God, he suddenly develops a desire for enjoyment. This craving makes him fall from yoga. In the next life he will have the same spiritual tendencies."

Mahendra: "Then what is the way out?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "There is no liberation as long as you nurse some desire for enjoyment. That is why you should fulfill all desires. Eat, dress, enjoy sex, and so on in time. (*Smiling*) What do you think? Should it be with your own wife or another woman?" (*M. and Mukherji laugh.*)

Chapter II

Life of Thakur told by himself – various desires of Thakur

His earlier story – first visit to the Nath's garden in Calcutta – bath in the Ganges

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's not good to have a desire for enjoyment. That's why I used to fulfill any desire which arose in my mind right away.

"When I saw some colourful sandesh at Burrabazar, I wanted to eat them. They brought them to me and I ate a lot of them, but then I got sick.

"One day in my childhood, when I was taking a dip in the Ganges, I saw a boy with a golden band around his waist. I was in the garden of the Naths. During a state of ecstasy, I felt I should also wear a band of gold. But I couldn't wear it long. When I put it on, a creeping sensation rose up inside me, a rapid, slithering movement. You see, my body had

touched gold. I had to take it off right away. If I hadn't, I would have had to tear it off.

"I also felt a craving for the parched rice-balls[1] of Dhanekhali and the fried milk sweetmeat[2] of Krishnanagar." (*All laugh.*)

His earlier story – listening to chanting of Chandi by Sambhu and Raj Narayana – Thakur serves the sadhus

"I wanted to hear the recitation of the Chandi by Sambhu. After hearing it, I wanted to hear the chanting again by Raj Narayana. I heard it, too.

"Many sadhus used to visit at that time. I felt the desire to have a separate bhandara (free kitchen) for their service. Mathur Babu complied with my wish. The sadhus were given food, fuel, and so on from that bhandara.

"Once a wish arose in my mind to wear an expensive robe made of gold thread and to smoke a silver hubble-bubble. Mathur Babu sent the new robe, hubble-bubble, everything. I put the robe on and puffed at the hubble-bubble in different ways, first this way and then another, once from above and then from below. Then I said to myself, 'O mind, this is what is known as smoking a silver hubble-bubble.' And I gave it up. I wore the robe for a little while and then took it off. I stamped on it, spat on it, and said, 'So this is an expensive robe. This robe brings rajas.'"

1. Khaichur, a round sweetmeat prepared by boiling coarsely powdered parched rice in sugar malt.
2. Sarbhaja, a sweetmeat prepared by frying milk-film.

Rakhal and Balaram in Vrindavan – Thakur's earlier story – Rakhal experiences his first ecstasy in 1881

Rakhal is in Vrindavan with Balaram. In the beginning he used to write letters praising Vrindavan. He wrote to M., "It is really a very nice place. You must come. Peacocks and peahens dance together. And there is music and dance – there is perpetual joy." After that Rakhal fell ill with a fever common to Vrindavan. Thakur was very worried when he heard about it. He took a vow to worship the Chandi for his sake. Talking about Rakhal, he said, "It was here that Rakhal first experienced ecstasy, while he was massaging my feet. A Bhagavata pundit was in the room speaking about the Bhagavata. Listening to what he was saying, Rakhal first began to tremble every now and then, and then he became perfectly still.

"He experienced ecstasy a second time in Balaram's house. He lay down in that state.

"Rakhal's spiritual ideal is God with form. He will leave a place where the formless God is mentioned.

"I made a vow to worship Chandika[1] for his sake. He has renounced his home and family and depends on me. I used to send him to his wife – he had a little desire for enjoyment left.

"He wrote to him (*pointing to M.*) from Vrindavan, 'It is a good place. Peacocks and peahens dance together. These birds have put me in a difficult situation.'

1. A form of Durga.

"He's there with Balaram. Ah, what a sweet nature Balaram has! He doesn't go to Kathar in Orissa for my sake. His brother has stopped sending him a monthly allowance saying, 'Come live here. Why are you wasting so much money there?' He didn't listen, just because he wants to see me.

"What a fine nature he has! Day and night he is busy with worship. His gardeners make garlands for the Deity. He will stay in Vrindavan for four months just to save money. He gets a monthly allowance of two hundred rupees."

His earlier story – he weeps for Narendra – Narendra's first visit to him in 1881

"Why am I so fond of these young men? The idea of 'lust and greed' has not entered their minds yet. I see them as ever-perfect.

"When Narendra came the first time, he was dressed in a dirty cloth. But looking at his face and eyes, I felt that he had mettle within. He didn't know many songs then. He sang one or two: 'O mind, return to thy abode' and 'Will my days just pass in vain, O Lord?'

"When he came, the room would be full of people, but I would talk looking only at him. He'd say, 'Please talk to them.' Then I would.

"I used to weep for him in Jadu Mallick's garden house. I was mad with longing to see him. I would hold Bholanath's hand and weep. Bholanath said, 'Sir, it's not right for you to do this for the sake of a

kayastha boy.'[1] The fat brahmin[2] one day folded his hands and said, 'Sir, he's only moderately educated. Why do you get so restless for him?'

"Bhavanath and Narendra are a twosome, they're a couple like husband and wife. That's why I asked Bhavanath to associate closely with Narendra. The spiritual ideal of both of them is the formless One."

Strict rules for sannyasins – renunciation for teaching others – Ghoshpara spiritual practices

"I forbid the youngsters from visiting with women frequently or staying long with them.

"Haripada fell into the snare of a Ghoshpara woman. She exhibits motherly affection, and Haripada is a child. He doesn't understand anything. These women act like this when they see youngsters. I hear that Haripada lies in her lap, and she feeds him with her own hands. I shall tell him that all this is not good. This motherly affection may later turn to lower conduct.

"These women carry out spiritual disciplines with men, taking them to be Sri Krishna. They say, 'He is Raja Krishna.' Their guru asks, 'Have you found your Raja Krishna?' They say, 'Yes, I have.'

"The other day that woman came here. I saw her furtive glances. Not good! Gauging her sentiments I said, 'Treat Haripada as you are doing now – and don't change your feelings.'

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1. The Kayasthas were a community noted for their adaptability to secular society. Under British rule many Kayasthas learned English and gave their children a British education.
2. A nickname for Prankrishna.

"The young men are in the stage of practicing spiritual disciplines. Their only practice now must be renunciation. A sannyasin must not even see a picture of a woman. I tell them, 'Even if a woman is a devotee, do not sit beside her and talk. Speak very briefly, while standing.' Even after attaining perfection, you have to do this. It is both for your own protection and for setting an example. When women come here, I also say to them after a while, 'Now go and visit the temples.' If they don't leave when I say this, I myself leave. Seeing me do this, others will learn."

His earlier story – visit to Phului Shyambazar in 1880 – attraction of an incarnation

"Well, you see, all these youngsters are coming here, and so are you. What does it mean? There certainly must be something here (within me). Why else would you feel attracted, why would I draw people here?

"When I was in Hriday's home in the countryside (in Sihore, near Kamarpukur), they took me to Shyambazar. I could see that they were devotees of Gauranga. It was revealed to me before I entered the village. I saw Gauranga. There was such an attraction that crowds of people came for seven days and nights. And there was only kirtan and dance. People sat on walls and some in the trees.

"I stayed at Natabar Goswami's house. There were crowds of people there day and night. I'd run away to a weaver's house in the morning, but people would gather there in no time. They'd bring

drums and cymbals. The drums would play 'takuti, takuti.' We'd have our meal at three in the afternoon.

"News went around that a man had died and come to life again seven times. Lest I should fall ill from the heat, Hriday would pull me out into the fields. But there, too, crowds gathered like rows of ants. Again the same playing of drums and cymbals: 'Takuti, takuti!' Hriday would say to them angrily, 'Have we never heard kirtan before?'

"The Vaishnava priests[1] came to create a row, thinking that we were there to take away their fees. But then they saw that I didn't touch a piece of cloth or even a thread. One of them said, 'He is a knower of Brahman.' So the gosais wanted to test me. One of them asked, 'Why doesn't he have a rosary or a holy mark on his forehead?' Another of them answered, 'The dry branch of the coconut tree has dropped off on its own.' I learned about the 'coconut branches' from there – that after one has attained knowledge of Brahman, all adjuncts fall off by themselves.

"People from distant villages would come and spend the night there. A number of women slept in the courtyard of the house where I was staying. Hriday was going out to urinate one night. They said, 'You might do it here (in the courtyard) itself.'

"I came to understand there in Shyambazar the attraction of the Divine Incarnation. When God descends to play His part, attraction is generated by Yogamaya. A spell is cast."

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1. Gosais.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and Radhika Goswami

It is almost three o'clock. Thakur has been talking to the two Mukherji brothers and other devotees. Radhika Goswami, who is about thirty years old, arrives and salutes Thakur. This is his first visit. He takes a seat.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you belong to the Advaita family?"

The Goswami: "Yes, sir."

Hearing that the goswami is a descendent of Advaita Goswami, Thakur salutes him with folded hands.

Reverence for the family of goswamis and brahmins – birth in the family of a saint

Sri Ramakrishna: "Born into the family of Advaita Goswami! Surely one inherits the qualities of one's ancestors.

"A high quality mango tree yields only high quality mangoes. (*The devotees laugh.*) No bad fruit, though there is some difference in size. Some small, others large, because of the quality of the soil. Isn't that right?"

The goswami (*humbly*): "Sir, what do I know?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Whatever you may say, people won't let you off so easily.

"A brahmin may have a thousand faults but he is revered if he belongs to the lineage[1] of Bharadvaja or Shandilya. Please narrate the tale of the falcon with conch-like markings on its wings."[2]

M. remains silent. Thakur continues.

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you have a saintly person as a predecessor, he will certainly pull you up, even if you have a thousand faults. When the Gandharvas captured the Kauravas, Yudhisthira had them liberated. He set free even Duryodhana, who had shown him so much enmity and was the cause of his exile.

"Besides, one should respect the holy garb. It reminds one of the real thing. Chaitanya Deva put religious robes on a donkey and then bowed to it.

"Why do people salute the shankhachila? When Kamsa tried to kill the Divine Mother,[3] she flew away as a falcon with conchlike markings on her wings. That's why, everyone bows to see this kind of bird."

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1. Gotra, one of forty-nine subdivisions of the brahmin caste, each the lineage of a celebrated teacher.
2. Shankhachila.
3. When the evil King Kamsa learned that a son of his sister Devaki would slay him, he imprisoned her and her husband Vasudeva. At birth Krishna was switched with the Divine Mother, who had taken the form of an infant. When Kamsa came to kill the baby, the Divine Mother transformed herself into a bird (the shankhachila) and flew away.

His earlier story – Koar Singh worships Thakur at Chanak – Thakur's loyalty to the king

"Soldiers saluted an Englishman who came to the cantonment of Chanak. Koar Singh explained to me that the country is under English rule, so one must salute an Englishman."

Thakur condemns sectarianism before the goswami – Shaktas and Vaishnavas

"Shaktas follow the Tantra while Vaishnavas follow the Puranas. It is not wrong for Vaishnavas to speak about their spiritual practices. But the followers of Tantra keep their practices secret. That's why you can't completely understand a Shakta.

(*To the goswami*) "You are good people. You do so much japa and chant the name of the Lord so much."

The goswami (*humbly*): "We do nothing great. I am worthless."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "Humility is good, but there's another attitude: 'I repeat the name of Lord Hari. How can sin touch me?' People who say every day, 'I am a sinner, sinner I am; I am worthless, worthless I am,' indeed become so. What lack of faith! A person who has chanted His name so much and yet says, 'Sin, sin!'"

The goswami is amazed to hear this.

His earlier story – Thakur dresses as a Vaishnava in Vrindavan – 1868

Sri Ramakrishna: "I dressed myself in the garb of a Vaishnava in Vrindavan and wore it for fifteen days. (*To the devotees*) I used to practice the disciplines of all the different paths of religion for a few days. Only then would I feel at peace.

(*Laughing*) "I practiced them all. And I accept all paths. I accept the Shaktas as well as the Vaishnavas. And also the Vedantists. That's why people of all faiths come here. They all think I belong to their faith. I also respect the modern Brahmos.

"Somebody had a large tub with a single dye in it. But it had this wonderful quality: it would dye cloth any colour someone desired.

"One clever fellow said, 'You have to give me the dye which you used to dye their clothes.' (*Thakur and all others laugh*.)

"Why should I be one-sided? I'm not worried that people of a certain faith won't visit. It doesn't matter to me if someone comes or not. I also have no thought that a certain person should be in my control. Adhar Sen wanted me to pray to the Divine Mother so that he'd get a high position. He didn't get it. As a consequence, if he thinks in a different way about me, let him. I don't care."

His earlier story – feeling of the formless One in Keshab Sen's house – with Vijay Goswami in the school of Gadadhar from Ariadaha – Vijay's character

"And then when I went to Keshab Sen's house my attitude changed. They are always talking there

of the formless One. So I said to the Divine Mother in an ecstatic mood, 'Mother, don't come here. These people don't believe in Your forms.'"

The goswami is quiet when he hears all these words against sectarianism.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Vijay is in a very good state of mind.

"He falls on the ground when he chants, 'Hari, Hari.'

"He spends his time until four in the morning in devotional singing and meditation. He wears ochre cloth now. When he sees an image of God, he prostrates to offer his salutations.

"He went to Gadadhar's schoolhouse with me. I said, 'Here, he [Chaitanya Deva] used to practice meditation.' Immediately Vijay prostrated there.

"He again prostrated himself before Sri Chaitanya's picture."

The goswami: "And before the image of Radha-Krishna?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He fell prostrate there too. All his actions are orthodox."

The goswami: "He can now be taken into Vaishnava society."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He doesn't care much what people say."

The goswami: "But Vaishnava society would be benefited by having such a person."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He has great respect for me.

"It is difficult to find him. Today he is invited to Dacca, tomorrow to another place. He is always so busy.

"There are lots of problems in the (Sadharan Brahmo) Samaj."

The goswami: "Why, sir?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "They say to him, 'You associate yourself with believers in God with form. You've become an idolater.'

"He is broad-minded and straightforward. Unless one is simple at heart, one doesn't receive the grace of God."

Instructions to the Mukherjis – household life – go forward – yoga of practice[1]

Now Thakur is talking with the Mukherji brothers. The elder brother, Mahendra, is in business. He has not taken service under anyone. The younger, Priyanath, used to be an engineer. He has now made some provision and no longer works. The elder Mukherji is thirty-five or thirty-six. His home is in the village of Kedati. He also has a house at Baghbazar in Calcutta.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "If you feel a little inspiration, don't rest content. You must go forward. There is more after the sandalwood trees – there are silver mines and gold mines."

Priya (*smiling*): "Sir, our legs are shackled. We can't move forward."

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1. Abhyasa yoga.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What can shackles on the feet do? It is the mind that matters.

"You are bound or freed by the mind. There were two friends. One of them went to visit a prostitute and the other to listen to a recital of the Bhagavata. The former said, 'I am damned. My friend is listening to a recital of the story of Lord Hari and I am here in such a dirty place!' The one listening to the Bhagavata said to himself, 'I am cursed. See how my friend is enjoying himself and having fun. What a fool I am!' Just see, the first one was taken after death by the messengers of Vishnu to Vaikuntha.[1] The latter was taken to the nether world of Yama."[2]

Priya: "But the mind is not under my control."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do you mean? There is the yoga of practice.[3] Practice it. You will see that your mind will go wherever you take it.

"The mind is like a freshly laundered cloth. It will get dyed red if you put it in red dye, and you can dye it blue by putting it in blue dye. Whatever colour you dye it in, it will take that colour.

(*To the goswami*) "Have you anything to ask?"

The goswami (*very humbly*): "No, sir. I've been able to see you and have been listening to all you are saying."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Now go and visit the deities in the temples.

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1. Heaven.
2. God of death.
3. Abhyasa yoga.

The goswami (*very humbly*): "Could you sing a little on the greatness of Sri Chaitanya?[1]

Thakur sings for the goswami:

Why has my body turned fair-complexioned?

Then:

Gauranga Deva casts a glance toward Vrindavan,

And from his eyes flow tears of ecstasy.

And again:

What is this, if not divine rapture?

Gauranga is an ocean of bliss.

In ecstasy he laughs, weeps, dances, and sings.

Every wooded grove he sees as Vrindavan, and the ocean as the Jamuna.

He places his head on his own feet,

For he is Gaur without, but Sri Krishna within.[2]

Advice to Radhika Goswami about harmony of religions

Thakur speaks again after the song is over.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the goswami*): "All these songs suit you (Vaishnavas). But if a Shakta or someone from the Ghoshpara sect comes, what shall I sing?

"You will find all kinds of attitudes here, for different kinds of people – Vaishnavas, Shaktas, Kartabhajas, Vedantists, as well as Brahmos.

"It is by His will that so many different religions, so many beliefs, have come into existence.

1. Mahaprabhu.
2. For the complete song refer to Section XIX, Chapter IV.

"God has given to everyone what agrees with his stomach. A mother doesn't serve rice and fish[1] to all her children. It doesn't suit everyone. So for some, she prepares fish soup.

"A person clings to the attitude which is agreeable to his nature and feelings.

"In a community festival where different kinds of people visit, images of various kinds are made. There are images of Radha-Krishna, Hara-Parvati and Sita-Rama – different images placed in different places. And you see people crowding before each one. Vaishnavas are seen standing for a long time to view Radha-Krishna, Shaktas near Hara-Parvati, and those who are devotees of Rama crowd around Sita-Rama.

"But those whose minds are not inclined toward any deity at all belong to a different class. At a community festival, they also prepare images such as a prostitute beating her paramour with a broom. People who have no deity in mind stand there with mouths agape, and the people look at them and call out loudly to their friends, 'Tell me, what are you looking at there? Come here, come here.'" (*Everyone laughs*.)

The goswami salutes and takes his leave.

1. Pulao.

Chapter IV

Thakur makes merry with the young devotees – he watches the arati of Mother Kali and fans Her with a chamara

The Mother and son talk. Why do you make me reason?

It is five o'clock. Thakur is on the western verandah. Baburam, Latu, the two Mukherji brothers, M., and some others are with him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and the others*): "Why should my mind run in a single track? These people are Vaishnavas and bigoted. They think that only their belief is correct and that all others are wrong. What I have said has gone deep into him [meaning Radhika Goswami]. (*Smiling*) An elephant needs to be goaded on the head because that's where it is sensitive."

Now Thakur begins to have fun with the youngsters.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "I don't serve them [the youngsters] only vegetarian food. I also give them a little water smelling of fish. Otherwise, why would they come?"

The Mukherjis leave the verandah to stroll for a while in the garden.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "I used to practice japa – and go into samadhi. What does that mean?"

M. (*very seriously*): "That is very good, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Good! Good! But what would they (the Mukherjis) think about it?"

M.: "Why? Didn't Captain say that you are like a child? After realizing God, one becomes like a child."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That person at times acts like a child, a boy, and sometimes like an adult. In boyhood he talks nonsense. Sometimes he even uses foul language. But when he is in the state of adulthood, he teaches forcefully like a lion.

"You'd better talk to the Mukherjis and explain."

M.: "I don't have to explain. Don't they know already?"

After a few jokes with the youngsters, Sri Ramakrishna says to a devotee, "It is new moon today.[1] Please go to the Divine Mother's temple.'

The sound of arati can be heard after dusk. Thakur says to Baburam, "Come, let's go to the Kali temple." Then he and Baburam and M. go. Seeing Harish sitting on the verandah, Thakur says, "Is he again in ecstasy?"

Crossing the courtyard, they watch the arati of Sri Radhakanta for a while. Then they continue toward Mother Kali's temple. Thakur raises his arms and calls out to the Mother of the Universe, "Mother, O Mother. O, Brahmamayi!" Coming to the raised platform in front of the temple, he prostrates in salutation to the Divine Mother. The arati is being performed before the Mother. Thakur enters the shrine and begins to fan Her with a chamara.

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1 Amavasya.

The worship ends. The people who had been watching the arati all prostrate together. Sri Ramakrishna comes out of the shrine and salutes Her. Mahendra Mukherji and the other devotees also salute.

Today is new moon day, the darkest day of the fortnight. Thakur becomes fully absorbed in ecstasy, in divine intoxication. He holds Baburam's hand and returns to his room staggering like a drunkard.

The lamp-lighter has lit a lamp on the western verandah of his room. Thakur comes and sits there for some time. He chants, "Hari Om, Hari Om," and several other mantras from the Tantras.

In a little while Thakur goes and sits on his small bed, facing east. Even now he is fully absorbed in a divine mood.

The Mukherji brothers, Baburam, and others sit on the floor.

Origin of language – the philosophy of prayer

Absorbed in ecstasy, Thakur talks with the Divine Mother. He says, "Mother, that You will only do it when I speak to You – that cannot be true.

"What does talking really mean? It is just giving a hint. Someone says, 'I shall eat.' Another person says, 'Go on, I won't listen to you.'

"Well, Mother, if someone says, 'I want to eat,' doesn't he still feel hungry? It cannot be that You will listen only when I pray to You, that You will not listen when I long within. This cannot be true.

"You are what You are. Then why do I speak? Why do I pray?

"Oh, I do what You make me do.

"Oh, it is all confusion. Why do You make me reason?"

Thakur is talking to God. The devotees listen to him, speechless with wonder.

Samskaras and necessity of austerities – instruction to the devotees – service to sadhus

Now Thakur glances at the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Good tendencies of past birth[1] are essential to realize God. You have to have done something, practiced some austerities. Whether it is done in this life or in a past one.

"When Draupadi was being disrobed, the Lord appeared before her when he heard her earnest cry. He said, 'Try to remember if you have ever given a piece of cloth in charity. If you have, your modesty will be saved.' Draupadi said, 'I remember a rishi bathing in a river and his loin cloth floated away with the current. I tore off half of my cloth and gave it to him.' The Lord said, 'Then you have nothing to fear now.'"

M. is sitting on a foot rug east of Thakur's bed.

(*To M.*) "Have you understood this?"

M.: "Yes sir, about tendencies."

1. Samskaras.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Please repeat what I have said. Let me hear."

M.: "Draupadi had gone for a bath –" (*Hazra enters.*)

Chapter V

Hazra Mahashay

Hazra has been living here for the last two years. He first met Thakur in 1880 in the village of Sihore near Kamarpukur. Thakur's nephew, Hriday Mukhopadyaya, the son of his cousin Himangani Devi,[1] lived there. At the time Thakur was staying at Hriday's house.

Hazra's native village is Madagod near Sihore. He has some land there. He is married and has children and other relatives. They get by somehow, though he has a debt of about a thousand rupees.

Hazra has felt dispassion since youth. He has a habit of seeking out sadhus and devotees. When he first came to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar and wanted to stay there, Thakur, already having met him in the village and seeing his devotional nature, asked him to stay and look after him.[2]

Hazra's attitude is that of a man of knowledge. He doesn't like Thakur's devotional nature and his interest in the youngsters. Now and then he thinks of

1. Daughter of Thakur's father's sister.

2. Hazra (Pratap Chandra Hazra): When he was about thirty-eight years old, Pratap left his wife and children to lead a spiritual life at Dakshineswar. Argumentative and critical of others, he nevertheless had extraordinary faith and devotion to Ramakrishna, who joked that he was there to "thicken the plot." He returned to his native village of Madagod, near Kamarpukur, where he died at the age of sixty-three or sixty-four, in the month of Chaitra, 1306 B.Y. (A.D 1900).

Sri Ramakrishna as a great soul, but at other times, he looks upon him as an ordinary individual.

He has taken a seat in the southeastern verandah of Thakur's room. There he repeats God's name on a rosary. Rakhal and other devotees do not spend as much time practicing japa, and Hazra criticizes them because of it.

He is a stickler for religious rules of conduct, which have become a sort of mania with him. He is about thirty-eight years old.

Hazra enters the room. Thakur enters a somewhat ecstatic mood and begins to talk.

Does God listen to prayers? – weep for Him, He will listen

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hazra*): "What you are doing is all right. But somehow it doesn't come together right.

"Don't find fault with anyone. Not even an insect. You yourself tell the tale of the sage Lomasha. Just as you pray for love of God, you must also pray that you may not find fault with others."

Hazra: "Does He listen if you pray for divine love?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A hundred times – if it is genuine and sincere. Does a worldly man weep for God as he does for his wife or son?"

His earlier life – the trembling of a resident of Kamarpukur over his wife's illness

"The wife of a person fell ill. Thinking that her illness was incurable, this fellow began to shake with fear and was about to fall down unconscious!

"Who does that for God?"

Hazra takes the dust of Thakur's feet.

Sri Ramakrishna (*hesitating*): "What are you doing?"

Hazra: "Shall I not take the dust of the feet of the man I live with?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Satisfy God and everyone will be satisfied! The whole world is pleased when God is pleased. When the Lord felt satisfied after eating the greens in Draupadi's pot and said, 'I am full,' all the beings of the whole world were satisfied. Indeed, they felt they had eaten more than their fill. But when the sages ate, was the whole world satisfied? Did it feel that it had eaten more than its fill?"

Thakur is saying that some work is necessary for the teaching of mankind.

His earlier story – a sadhu under the banyan tree worships his guru's sandals and a shalagram

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hazra*): "Even after attaining spiritual knowledge, one performs worship and other rituals in order to set an example.

"I visit the Kali temple and also bow before all these pictures in my room. That's why others do it.

If a habit is formed, the mind feels uncomfortable if it is not done.

"I saw a sannyasin under the banyan tree. He had placed his guru's sandals on a small carpet. And he placed a shalagram on the same carpet! He was worshipping them! I asked, 'If you have attained so much spiritual knowledge, what is the need of ritualistic worship?' The sannyasin said, 'I'm doing everything else, why not this too? I can place a flower on the guru's foot, and also on the emblem.'

"As long as one has a body, one cannot give up work. As long as there is mud at the bottom of the lake, there are bound to be some bubbles."[1]

The three stages: the scripture, the word of the guru, and spiritual practice; then one achieves the Goal

(*To Hazra*) "If there is knowledge of one, there is also knowledge of many. What help is there in mere reading of the scriptures?

"Scriptures contain sugar mixed with sand. It is very difficult to take out only the sugar. Therefore, one should hear the essence of a scripture from a sadhu or guru. After that, what is the need for scripture anymore?

"Say you've received a letter requesting five seers of sandesh and a piece of wearing cloth. If the letter is lost, you look for it anxiously. Finding it

1. It is indeed impossible for an embodied being to renounce action entirely. But he who renounces the fruit is regarded as one who has renounced (Gita 18:11).

after a long search, you read it: 'Send five seers of sandesh and a piece of cloth.' Then, you can throw the letter away. What use is it now? Your work now is to procure the sandesh and cloth.

(*To Mukherji, Baburam, M., and other devotees*) "After getting all the information, dive in. Having made sure where the pot is lying on the bottom of the pond, dive only there.

"You have to hear the essence of the scriptures from the lips of the guru and then take to spiritual practices. When you are absolutely sure what the right spiritual practice is for you, you begin to perceive God directly.

"And you can be sure of the right spiritual practice only when you dive. What use is it to sit down and reason about what you have read in the scriptures? Fools just reason about the way and then perish, because they don't dive. Let them go!

"If you say that in diving there is the fear of sharks and crocodiles – the fear of desires and anger – then rub your body with turmeric powder before you dive. They won't come near you. Turmeric powder is discrimination and non-attachment."

Chapter VI

His earlier story: Sri Ramakrishna's practice of spiritual disciplines according to the Purana, the Tantra, and the Vedanta – spiritual practices in the panchavati, under the bel tree and in the chandni – initiation into sannyasa from Totapuri in 1866

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "God made me practice various kinds of spiritual disciplines, first according to the Puranas, then according to the Tantras and also the disciplines of the Vedas. At first I practiced them in the panchavati. I planted a grove of tulsi plants, and I used to sit inside it and meditate. Sometimes I would call out with great longing, 'Mother, Mother,' or at times repeat, 'Rama, Rama.'

"When I repeated the name of Rama, I would sometimes tie a tail on my body in the spirit of Hanuman. It was a state of deep intoxication. During that time, I'd put on a silk cloth to worship. What joy was in that worship!

"The spiritual practices according to the Tantra were performed under the bel tree. At that time I could see no difference between a tulsi plant and the fruit of a sajina.[1]

"In that state, I used to eat the leftovers from the previous night's offering to Mother Durga;[2] they could have been defiled by a snake or something.

"Sometimes I would ride a dog and push fried bread into its mouth and then eat it myself. The

1. Sajina: A vegetable of the genus Moringa, appearing as sticks growing on trees, and known in English as "drumstick leaves."
2. Shivani.

whole world is Vishnu. I would rinse my mouth[1] with water fallen in puddles on the ground; I brought water from the pond and put it in the puddles to rinse my mouth with.

"One cannot have spiritual realization without destroying ignorance. So I used to assume the attitude of a tiger and eat it up.

"When I performed disciplines according to the Vedas, I became a sannyasin. I used to lie down in the chandni and say to Hriday, 'I have become a sannyasin. I shall eat in the chandni.'"

Thakur sees various divine forms during his practice of spiritual disciplines – Mother of the Universe instructs him on the Vedanta and the Gita

(*To the devotee*) "I remained on my seat resolutely and said to the Divine Mother, 'I am a fool. Pray, let me know what is in the various scriptures – in the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras.'

"The Divine Mother said, 'The essence of the Vedanta is that Brahman alone is real, that the world is illusory. He who is mentioned as Sat-chit-ananda Brahman in the Vedas is called Sat-chit-ananda Shiva in the Tantra. It is He who is known as Sat-chit-ananda Krishna in the Puranas.'

"What you hear when the word *gita* is repeated ten times is the essence of the Gita; that is, 'tagi, tagi' [renounce, renounce].

1. Perform achamana, a preliminary purification rite of ritualistic worship, sipping and sprinkling water.

"When a person realizes God, the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Purana, and the Tantra all become insignificant.

(*To Hazra*) "He is no longer able to pronounce Om. Why does this happen? I cannot utter the word Om unless I come down very far from samadhi.

"The scriptures describe various states one has after a direct vision of God. I had them all – the state of a child, of a ghoul, and of lifeless matter.

"I also used to have visions the way they are described in the scriptures. At times I would see the whole universe filled with sparks of fire. Sometimes, I saw lakes of mercury all around me, shining brightly. And sometimes I would see it as molten silver. At times, I saw, as it were, torches giving out many-coloured lights.

"All these conform to what is said in the scriptures. That was reassuring."

Sri Ramakrishna's state – union of the phenomenal and the Absolute

"And then it was revealed to me that God Himself had become the living beings, the universe, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. Climbing up to the rooftop and then coming down the stairs. It's the process of involution and evolution.

"Oh, what states I was kept in! One state would follow another like the movement of a husking machine. When one goes down, the other goes up.

"When I am in meditation, in samadhi, I see God. I also see Him when my mind comes back to the external world. I see Him on this side of the

mirror, and I also see Him on the back of the mirror."

Both the Mukherji brothers, Baburam, and other devotees listen to Thakur, amazed.

Chapter VII

His earlier story – detachment of Sambhu Mallick – takes shelter with a saintly person

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mukherji and others*): "Captain now is in the state of a spiritual aspirant.

"It isn't necessarily true that one remains attached (to the world) just by being rich. Sambhu (Mallick) used to say, 'Hridu, I sit here ready with my bundle packed.' I would say, 'What an ominous thing you are saying!' Then Sambhu would say, 'No, please say that I may go to Him, having renounced everything.'

"Devotees of God have no fear. They are near and dear to Him. He will draw them. When Duryodhana and his companions were made prisoners by the Gandharvas, it was Yudhisthira who had them released. He said, 'It would be a disgrace if our relatives remain in such difficulty.'"

Brahmins of the temple – Sri Ramakrishna preaches devotion to them

It is about 9 p.m. Both the Mukherji brothers are getting ready to return to Calcutta. Thakur gets up and strolls for a while through the room and the verandah. He hears loud singing in the Vishnu temple. Asking about it, a devotee tells him, "Latu

and Harish have joined them." Thakur says, "That's it."

Thakur goes to the Vishnu temple with the devotees. They prostrate before Sri Radhakanta.

Thakur notices that the brahmin servants of the temple, those who cook and prepare offerings for the deities and who serve it to the guests, have gathered together in a large number to sing the kirtan. Thakur stands there for a while and encourages them.

Returning to his room through the courtyard, he says to the devotees, "Look, some of these fellows wash the pots and pans, and some of them visit houses of prostitution."

Reaching his room, Thakur sits down on his cot. Those who were engaged in singing kirtan come and salute him.

Thakur says to them, "As you sweat to earn money, so you should perspire chanting Lord Hari's name, dancing and singing."

"I thought of dancing with you. But then I saw that the vegetable was seasoned perfectly – even fenugreek had been put in. (*All laugh.*) What seasoning could I add to it?

"Please come here now and then to sing Lord Hari's name."

Mukherji and others bow to Thakur and take their leave.

Their carriage comes right up to the smaller verandah north of Thakur's room. Its lights are lit.

Departure of devotees – Thakur's affection for them

Thakur is standing on the northeastern side of the verandah facing north. A devotee brings a light to show the devotees the way to the carriage.

Today is the dark new moon night, the night of Amavasya. The Ganges flows to the west of Thakur and in front is the nahabat, the flower garden, and the kuthi. The path to the main gate is to the right of Thakur.

The devotees bow their heads at Thakur's feet and then get into the carriage one after the other. Thakur says to a certain devotee, "Why don't you tell Ishan to find some work for him?"

Seeing that there are too many people riding in the carriage, creating a hardship for the horse, Thakur asks, "Aren't there too many people for one carriage?"

He remains standing. The devotees leave for Calcutta, watching Thakur's image full of love and grace for the devotees.[1]

1. Bhakta vatsala.

Section XXI

Thakur with Latu, M., Manilal, Mukherji, and Other Devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

Instruction to Manilal, the Brahmo, to give up dogmatism

Sri Ramakrishna is at the Dakshineswar temple with devotees.

It is Thursday, 2 October 1884, 17th of Ashwin, 1291 B.Y. – the twelfth and thirteenth day of the bright fortnight of Ashwin, two days after the Vijay Dashami day. The previous day Thakur had graced Adhar's house in Calcutta with a visit. A number of people were there – Narayan, Baburam, M., Kedar, Vijay, and others. During the kirtan Thakur danced with the devotees. [*See* Volume II of the Kathamrita.]

Latu, Ramlal, and Harish are living with Thakur these days. Ramlal is the priest of Mother Bhavatarini. Baburam stays there at times, and Hazra also lives there.

Manilal Mallick, Priya Mukherji, his relative Hari, a Brahmo devotee from Shivapur (Dari), and some Marwari devotees from 12 Mallick Street in Burrabazar are present. Gradually, some youngsters from Dakshineswar, Mahendra Kaviraj from Sinthi, and other devotees arrive. Manilal is an old member of the Brahmo Samaj.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Manilal and the others*): "It's better to salute mentally. What is the need to

touch the feet with your hand? Besides, mental salutation won't embarrass anybody.

"It isn't good to feel that only your religion is true and all others are false.

"I see that God Himself has become all – human beings, images of the deity, Shalagram.[1] In everything, I see only one. I see none else.

"Many people think that only their belief is correct and that all others are wrong, that only we have won and all others have lost. Those who have advanced a little may perhaps have been stopped for a while. But those who had lagged behind might have advanced in the meantime. In the game of golakdham, the piece may advance a great deal – but it may fail to reach the goal because one fails to throw the right dice.

"Victory and defeat are in God's hands. A person can't understand God's ways. You see, a green coconut grows high in the tree so it gets a lot of sun, yet its fruit is cool. On the other hand, a water-chestnut[2] grows in water, but its nature is to heat the body.

"Just consider the human body. The head, which is the foundation (the root), is at the top."

Sri Ramakrishna, the four ashramas and the essence of yoga – Brahmo Samaj and concentration on God with the mind[3]

Manilal: "What is our duty now?"

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1. An abstract image of Vishnu in the form of an oval stone bearing certain markings.
2. Singhara.
3. Mano yoga.

Sri Ramakrishna: "To remain united with God no matter what work you do. There are two paths: the path of karma yoga, or work, and the path of manoyoga, or mental effort.

"Householders unite themselves with God through work. There are four stages of life: brahmacharya,[1] garhasthya,[2] vanaprastha[3] and sannyasa.[4] A sannyasin has to give up working with desire[5] (i.e. hankering after health, wealth, long life, progeny, name, fame, title, and social status) but must perform his daily duties without any desire for reward.[6] Carrying a staff, begging for food, pilgrimage, worship, and japa – this work unites one with God.

"Whatever work you do, if you renounce the desire for its fruit, without craving anything, you will be united with Him.

"The other way is union with God through the mind. Such a yogi shows no outward sign. It is all within. For example, Jada Bharata and Sukadeva. There are so many others, but these two are well known. Such people don't cut their hair or beard; they let them grow naturally.

"Work falls off in the stage of a paramahamsa. Such people remember God and meditate upon Him always. Their minds ever remain united with Him.

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1. The first stage in the four stages of life according to the Vedas, that of a celibate student.
2. Married household life.
3. Detaching from family affairs and concentrating on God.
4. Renunciation of the world.
5. Kamya karma.
6. Refer to Bhagavad Gita 18:2-3.

If a paramahamsa ever performs work, it is to teach others.

"Whether union with God is achieved by work or through concentration, a person knows everything when love of God is developed.

"Through love of God suspension of breath[1] comes about by itself. When the mind is concentrated, the breathing becomes regular. Only when the mind is concentrated is the breath[2] steadied, and when the breath is steady, the mind becomes one-pointed – the intellect becomes steady. The person who experiences this isn't even aware of it."

His earlier story – prays to the Mother of the Universe during the period of spiritual disciplines – bhakti yoga

"You can achieve everything through bhakti yoga. I said to the Divine Mother, weeping, 'Mother, let me know what yogis came to know by practicing yoga, what men of knowledge have known by discrimination. Please reveal it to me.' The Divine Mother showed it all to me. When one weeps before Her with yearning, She conveys all knowledge. She has revealed to me everything that is in the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Puranas, the Tantra – all these scriptures."

Manilal: "What about hatha yoga?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Hatha yogis are sadhus who are concerned with their bodies. They practice neti, and dhauti[3] – they take care of the body only. Their

1. Kumbhaka.
2. Vayu.
3. Internal washing.

aim is to add years to their life. Day and night they serve the body – this is not good."

Mani Mallick, the worldly man, and mental renunciation – about Keshab Sen

"What is your duty? You should mentally renounce 'lust and greed.' You can't look on the world as nothing but the droppings of a crow.

"The goswamis are householders. So I said to them, 'You have the duties of worship and service to the deity. How can you renounce the world? You can't brush family life aside by calling it maya.'

"Chaitanya Deva listed the duties of householders as: compassion for living beings, service to Vaishnavas, and chanting God's holy name.

"Keshab Sen once said, 'Now he [Sri Ramakrishna] asks us to attend to both, but one day he will sting us.' But that's not true. How can I sting?"

Mani Mallick: "So please sting us."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Why? You are quite all right as a householder. Why should you renounce?"

Chapter II

A religious teacher's renunciation of 'lust and greed' - only then is he able to teach – difficult rules for the sannyasin – advice to Brahmani Lal

Sri Ramakrishna: "Those through whom God will teach mankind must renounce the world. It is essential for religious teachers to renounce 'lust and greed.' Without it, their teachings are not

accepted. It is not enough for them to renounce inwardly. They must also renounce outwardly. Only then can they teach mankind. If they don't, people will think that they are being asked to renounce 'lust and greed,' while they secretly enjoy them.

"An Ayurvedic physician[1] prescribed some medicine to a patient and said, 'Please come again another day and I will tell you about diet.' That day, there were a number of jars of molasses[2] in his room. The patient lived quite far away. He came another day. The physician said to him, 'Be careful about your diet. Molasses is not good for you.' When the patient had left, somebody asked the physician, 'Why did you cause him the trouble of coming here again, all that way? You could have said this to him the first day.' The physician laughed and said, 'There is a reason. I had some jars of molasses in my room that day. If I had asked him to give up molasses, he wouldn't have trusted me. He would have thought, He has so many jars of molasses in his room, he must surely be eating some of it. In that case it can't be so bad. Today I have hidden the jars; he will now believe me.'

"I have seen the religious teacher[3] of the Adi [Brahmo] Samaj. I hear that he has married two or three times. And that he has grown sons. Such are religious teachers! If these people say that only the Lord is real and all else is an illusion, who will believe them? You can guess very well what kind of disciples they will have.

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1. Kaviraj.
2. Gur.
3. Acharya.

"'If a guru goes to relieve himself, his disciple must at least emit gas.' If a sannyasin has renounced mentally but lives with 'lust and greed,' he can't teach. People will say that he secretly eats molasses."

Sri Ramakrishna's renunciation of gold – he returns five rupees to the physician

"Mahendra of Sinti (a physician) gave five rupees to Ramlal, but I didn't know about it.

"When Ramlal told me, I asked him, 'For whom was that money given?' He replied, 'For you.' At first I thought I should use it to pay what I owed for milk. But, my mother! I woke up in the night very disturbed. It felt like a cat was scratching my chest. I went to Ramlal again and asked if the money was for his aunt.[1] He said no. So I said to him, 'Please go right now and return it.' He returned the money the next day.

"Do you know what it's like for a sannyasin to accept money, or to be greedy? Like a brahmin widow who has lived for a long time on vegetarian food and observed celibacy taking a man of low caste as her paramour. (*Everybody is stunned.*)

"In my native village, the low caste oil woman, Bhagi Teli, had many devotees and disciples. Noticing that so many people paid respect to a shudra,[2] the landlord sent a wicked man to tempt her. He corrupted her and all her spiritual practices

1. Meaning Holy Mother.
2. Caste of laborers and servants.

and strivings ended in dust. A fallen sannyasin meets such a fate."

Faith in God[1] result of association with the holy – Keshab Sen and Vijaykrishna Goswami

"You are householders. It is essential that you keep the company of holy men. Association with them brings faith in God. How can people gain faith and love for God if holy men do not chant the name and glories of God? People respect a person when they know him to be rich; then they seek his company.

(*To M.)* "You must practice disciplines even after you attain spiritual knowledge. The Naked One[2] used to say, 'What is the use of cleaning a brass pot only once? It will get tarnished if you don't polish it.'

"I'll go to your house one day. If I know where your residence is, I can meet other devotees there. Please go see Ishan some time.

(*To Manilal*) "Keshab Sen's mother came here. The boys of her family chanted the name of the Lord. She circumambulated them clapping her hands. I saw that she was not overcome with sorrow. She came here and observed [the fast of] Ekadashi; she repeated the name of God on a rosary. I was impressed by her great devotion to God."

Manilal: "Keshab's grandfather, Ramkamal Sen, was a devotee of God. He used to sit in a tulsi grove

1. Shraddha.
2. Totapuri.

and repeat the name of God. Keshab's father, Pyarimohan, was also a devoted Vaishnava."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Unless the father is so devoted, the son could not be a devotee. Just see what a state Vijay is in. His father would lose consciousness in ecstasy when he read the Bhagavata. Vijay often stands up chanting the name of God.

"The visions (of divine forms) that Vijay has these days are all real. About God with form or the formless God, Vijay said, 'It is like a chameleon – sometimes red, sometimes blue, and then at other times green. And it may even be colourless. God is sometimes with attributes and sometimes without them.'"

Vijay is guileless – 'when one is simple and guileless at heart, one realizes God'

"Vijay is very simple at heart. You cannot realize God if you're not large-hearted and guileless.

"Vijay went to Adhar Sen's house yesterday. He felt like it was his own house and everybody who lived there was his own.

"Unless your mind is free from calculating this and that, you cannot be simple or large-hearted."

Saying this, Thakur begins to sing:

O mind, you will gain precious wealth when you become pure.

"Unless the clay is properly prepared, you cannot make a pot. If there is grit or sand in the

clay, the pot will crack. That's why a potter prepares the clay carefully.

"If a mirror is dirty, you cannot see your face in it. Unless your mind[1] is pure, your real Self cannot be seen.

"Look, where there is an incarnation of God, there is guilelessness – Nandaghosh, Dasharatha, and Vasudeva were all simple at heart.

"Vedanta tells us that unless you have a pure mind, you don't feel the desire to know God. Only in one's last birth or after practicing long austerities, does one become broad-minded and guileless."

Chapter III

Childlike state of Sri Ramakrishna

Noticing some puffiness in his legs, Thakur becomes anxious, like a child.

The physician, Mahendra of Sinti, comes in and bows to him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Priya Mukherji and the other devotees*): "Yesterday, I said to Narayan, 'Please press your leg to see if it makes a dimple.' He pressed and there was one. I was saved! (*To Mukherji*) Please press your leg. See if it forms a dimple."

Mukherji: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Oh, what a relief."

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1. Chitta, a) The mind or inner organ of consciousness in general. b) In Vedanta, the storehouse of memory.

Mani Mallick: "Please bathe in the running water of the river. Why take medicine?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, my dear sir! You have stronger blood. Your case is different. God has kept me in the state of a child.

"One day in a grassy meadow I was bitten. I had heard that if a snake bites a second time, it sucks out its poison. So I sat there putting my hand in a hole. Someone came by and asked, 'What are you doing? If the snake bites in the same place as before, it can happen, but if it bites anywhere else, it doesn't help.'

"I had heard from someone that autumn dew was beneficial. Coming from Calcutta by carriage, I stuck my head out so the mist would touch it. (*Everyone laughs.*)

(*To Mahendra of Sinthi*) "Your pundit from Sinthi is good. He is well-versed in Vedanta. He has respect for me. When I said to him, 'You have certainly studied a lot, but do give up the pride that 'I am such-and-such a pundit,' he was delighted.

"I discussed Vedanta with him."

Instructions to M., pure Self and spiritual ignorance – Mahamaya and discussion on Vedanta

(*To M.*) "The pure Atman is unattached to things of the world. Maya, or ignorance, is in it. This very maya has three qualities: sattva, rajas, and tamas. That which is pure Atman has in it these three qualities, yet it is unattached. If you throw a blue tablet into a fire, you see a blue flame.

If you throw a red tablet in it, the flame is red. But the fire has no colour of its own.

"Put a blue pill in water and the water will become blue. Then you put alum in it and it will recover its own colour.

"A butcher was carrying a load of meat when he touched Shankaracharya by chance. As soon as Shankaracharya remarked, 'Hey, you touched me!' the butcher replied, 'My lord, neither have I touched you, nor have you touched me. You are pure Self, unattached to anything.'

"Jada Bharata also said the same thing to King Rahugana.

"The pure Self is unattached, and it cannot be seen. When common salt is dissolved in water, it becomes invisible to the eye.

"That which is pure Atman is Mahakarana, the cause[1] of causes. There are the gross, the subtle, the cause, and the Great Cause (Mahakarana). The five material elements are gross. Mind, intellect and ego are subtle. Nature or the Primal Power is the cause of everything. Brahman or the Atman, the pure Self, is the cause of the cause.

"This pure Atman is our true Self. What is spiritual knowledge? Knowledge of one's real Self, and keeping the mind in it. This is knowledge of the pure Atman."

How long does one have to work?

"How long does a person have to work? As long as there is body-consciousness. That is, as long as

1. Karana.

one clings to the idea of the body being one's self. The Gita says this.[1] To cling to the idea that the body is one's own self is ignorance.

(*To the Brahmo devotee from Shivapur*) "Are you a Brahmo?"

The Brahmo devotee: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "I can recognize an aspirant of the formless God by looking at his eyes and face. Please dive a little. You don't get jewels by swimming on the surface. I accept both, God with form and God without form."

Sri Ramakrishna and Marwari devotee – individual self – mind-stuff[2]

The Marwari devotees from the Burrabazar arrive and salute Thakur. Thakur praises them.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Ah, these are great devotees. They all go to the temple, sing hymns, and have prasad. The priest they have engaged this time is well versed in the Bhagavata."

Marwari devotee: "When a person says, 'I am Your servant,' who is this 'I'?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The subtle body[3] or individual soul. The subtle body is made up of these four: mind, intellect, mind-stuff, and ego."

Marwari devotee: "Then what is the individual self?"

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1. Bhagavad Gita 18:11.
2. Chitta.
3. Linga sarira.

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is the Atman bound by the eight fetters. And what is the chitta? That which exclaims: 'Oh!'"

The Marwari – what happens after death? What is maya? – the view of the Gita

Marwari devotee: "Sir, what happens after death?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "According to the Gita, you become what you think of at the time of death. King Bharata became a deer because he thought of a deer. That is why spiritual practice is essential to realize God. If you contemplate God day and night, the same thought will come to you at the time of your death."

Marwari devotee: "Well, sir, why can't we give up attachment to things of the world?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "This is what is called maya. It is maya that makes you perceive the real as unreal and the unreal as real. The real, in other words, is the eternal, the Supreme Brahman. The unreal is the world, the ephemeral."

Marwari devotee: "We read holy books. Why don't we assimilate them?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What does reading do? You need to practice spiritual disciplines, austerities. Call upon God. What can repeating, 'Hemp, hemp,' do? You have to eat it.

"This world is like a thorny bush. Touch it and your hand will bleed. If you take a thorny bush and just sit before it saying, 'This bush is burning,' will it burn up? You have to light the fire of knowledge and set fire to that bush. Only then will it burn up.

"You have to work hard in the stage of practicing spiritual disciplines. Later on, the path is easy. Detach the boat from the bank and let it sail with a favourable wind."

Renounce the world of maya first – then gain spiritual knowledge – realization of God

"As long as you live inside the house of maya, as long as clouds of maya exist, the sun of knowledge does not help. When you leave the house of maya and stand outside (when you have renounced 'lust and greed'), the sun of knowledge destroys ignorance. A lens doesn't burn paper if you bring it inside the house. If you come outside with it and the rays of the sun fall on it, the paper burns. Again, if it is cloudy, the lens can't burn the paper. Only when the clouds disappear does it burn.

"Only when you stand a little away from 'lust and greed' and practice spiritual disciplines and austerities is the darkness of the mind dispelled. The cloud of ignorance and egotism is burned away. And you gain spiritual knowledge.

"Again, 'lust and greed' is the cloud."

Chapter IV

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna faints hearing that Lakshmi Narayan wants him to accept ten thousand rupees – difficult rules of sannyasin

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the Marwari devotee*): "The rules that govern the conduct of one who has renounced completely[1] are very difficult. He must

1. Tyagi.

not have the least association with 'lust and greed.' He must not touch money with his hands, and he must not allow it to be kept near him.

"Lakshmi Narayan, a Marwari and a Vedantist used to visit me often. Seeing my dirty bed sheet, he said, 'I'll invest ten thousand rupees in your name. The interest from it can be used to pay your expenses.'

"As soon as he said this, it was like I had been struck with a stick and knocked out.

"When I regained consciousness, I said, 'If you say such a thing again, please don't come here anymore. I can't touch money – or keep it with me.'

"He had a very sharp intellect. He said to me, 'You still have the idea of accepting and rejecting. In that case, you haven't yet attained perfect knowledge.'

"I replied, 'My dear, I haven't attained to that extent.' (*All laugh.*)

"Then Lakshmi Narayan tried to give the money to Hriday. I said, 'I will not let that happen. If you do that, I'll have to tell him, "Give some to this man and some to that one." And if he doesn't, I'll feel angry. Possession of money is basically bad. If you place something near a mirror, won't it be reflected in it?"

Sri Ramakrishna and the essence of liberation – Puranic path, not the Vedic, enjoined for the Kaliyuga

The Marwari devotee: "Revered sir, does one attain liberation only when he quits the body on the bank of the Ganges?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Liberation comes when one has attained spiritual knowledge. Wherever one may be, whether one dies in the cremation ground or on the bank of the Ganges, a person of spiritual knowledge will attain liberation. But the bank of the Ganges is best for a person who has not attained knowledge."

The Marwari devotee: "Revered sir, why is a person liberated if he dies in Kashi (Benares)?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "When one dies in Kashi, Shiva appears before him and says, 'This form of mine is not real. I assume it for the sake of the devotee. Now look, I am dissolving into the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.' After saying this, the form disappears.

"According to the Puranas, even a pariah will attain liberation if he develops loving devotion to God. According to this belief, only chanting His name brings salvation; there is no need for sacrifices, oblations, tantric disciplines, or mantras.

"The teachings of the Vedas are different. According to them, only brahmins can gain liberation. And if the mantra is not recited properly, the worship is not accepted. One has to perform sacrifices, oblations, mantras, and tantric disciplines as prescribed."

Karma yoga is a very difficult path – bhakti yoga is enjoined for the Kaliyuga

"In the Kaliyuga where is the time to perform rituals as prescribed in the Vedas? So love for God according to Narada is enjoined for this age.

"Karma yoga is a very difficult path. Karma leads to bondage unless you can work without expectation of any reward. Besides, life depends on food. There is no time to perform all the rituals according to regulations. You can die by the time an ancient herbal medicine[1] is ready. You need to take a modern fever mixture.

"The path of devotion according to Narada is chanting His name and glories. Karma yoga is not suited to the Kaliyuga. The path of love for God is the right path."

Brahman is the very nature of existence – longing for God comes with right tendencies

Several young men from Dakshineswar village come in and pay their respects. They sit down and ask Thakur questions. It is about four o'clock.

Young man from Dakshineswar: "Sir, what is knowledge?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The Lord is real and all else is unreal; knowing this is knowledge. That which is real is called Brahman. His other name is Kala (Time). That is why they say, 'O brother, how many have departed and how many have come into being in time!'

"Kali, She who sports with Kala, is the Primal Power. Kala and Kali, Brahman and Shakti, are not different.

"That Brahman, the real nature of existence, is eternal. It exists in the present, it existed in the past, and it will exist in the future. It is without

1. Dashmul pachan.

beginning or end. It cannot be described in words. The most you can say is that It is of the very nature of Consciousness and Bliss.

"The world is impermanent, Brahman is eternal. The world is like magic. The magician is real, but the magic of the magician is transitory."

Young man: "If the world is maya – is magic – why doesn't it vanish?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Because of inborn tendencies. Living in the world of maya for several births, one begins to think of it as real.

"Just listen to how powerful tendencies are. The son of a king was born into a washerman's family in his previous birth. As a prince, when he played with his companions, he would say, 'No more of these games. I'll lie down on my stomach and you beat clothes on my back and make a splashing sound."[1]

Men with good tendencies: Govinda Pal, Gopal Sen, Niranjan, Hirananda – earlier story: arrival of Govinda, Gopal and the Tagore boys, 1863-64

"A number of young men visit this place, but only a few yearn for God. They are ones who are born with good tendencies.[2] When the topic of marriage is brought up, they wince. They don't ever think about marriage. Niranjan has been saying since childhood that he won't marry.

"A long time ago (more than twenty years), two young men used to visit from Baranagore. One of

1. Indian washermen wash clothes by beating them on a stone.
2. Samskaras.

them was Govinda Pal, the other Gopal Sen. Since their childhood, their minds were on God. They would get frightened at the very mention of marriage. Gopal used to go into bhava samadhi. He would shy away from meeting a worldly person – the way a mouse feels frightened to see a cat. When the Tagore boys came to walk in the garden here, he shut the door of his room in the kuthi, lest he would have to talk to them.

"Gopal went into ecstasy in the panchavati. In that state, he touched my feet and said, 'I must leave. I can no longer live in this world. You still have a long time to live. But I must go.' I said to him, also in a state of ecstasy, 'You must come again.' He replied, 'Yes, I will come again.'

"In a few days, Govinda came. I asked him, 'Where is Gopal?' He said, 'Gopal has passed away.'

"What are the other boys involved with? How to have money, a house, a carriage, dress, and then marriage. These are their only concerns. To get married, they first look for a girl and then go to see her to make sure she's pretty.

"There's a person who criticizes me a lot. He complains that I love the young men. I certainly love those who have good tendencies, who are pure-souled, who yearn for God, whose minds are not attracted by money, pleasures of life, and so on.

"If a person is married but has love for God, he won't get attached to the world."

Hirananda, a resident of Sindh, is a Brahmo devotee. He has a B.A. degree.

Manilal, the Brahmo devotee from Shivapur, the Marwari devotees, and the young men salute Sri Ramakrishna and take their leave.

Chapter V

When does one renounce work? Thakur's promise to a devotee

It is evening. The lamplighter brings light to the southern and western circular verandahs. Thakur's room has also been lighted and incense has been burnt.

Thakur, having taken his seat, is chanting the name of the Divine Mother and meditating on Her. M., Priya Mukherji, and his relative are sitting on the floor in the room.

After meditating for some time, Thakur resumes his conversation with the devotees. There is still time before the arati service in the shrines.

Sri Ramakrishna and Vedanta – Om and samadhi – Tat tvam asi – Om Tat Sat

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Of what use are rituals[1] for one who contemplates God day and night?"

He sings:

Of what use are rituals for one who utters Kali's name at dawn and noon and dusk? Worship itself will follow in his footsteps, never catching up.

Charity, vows, and almsgiving no longer appeal to Madan's mind. His worship alone is surrender at the Mother's blessed feet.

1. Sandhya, or worship and meditation in the morning, noon, and evening performed daily by orthodox Hindus.

"Sandhya merges in Gayatri, and Gayatri in Om.

"When just by pronouncing Om once one goes into samadhi, one has perfected himself.

"A sadhu in Rishikesh rises early in the morning and goes to stand near a big waterfall. The whole day he watches the fall and says to God, 'Oh, how beautiful you have made it! How beautiful it is! How wonderful!' He does not practice chanting of the name and other austerities. At nightfall he returns to his hut.

"What need is there to think about whether God has form or not? It is enough to weep with longing in solitude, 'O God, please show Yourself to me as You are!'

"He dwells within. That is why the Vedas say, 'Tat tvam asi (That thou art).' And He is also outside. Because of maya He appears as various forms, but in reality it is God alone who exists.

"That is why you should say 'Om Tat Sat' before you describe His forms or names.

"It is one thing to have His vision and another to read about Him in the scriptures. The scriptures only give hints about Him, so there's no need to read many of them. It's better to pray to Him in a solitary place.

"It's all right if you don't read the entire Gita. You get its essence by just repeating the word *gita* ten times – that is, *tyagi* (man of renunciation). 'O man, renounce everything and worship God.' That is the essence of the Gita."

Sri Ramakrishna watches the arati of Mother Bhavatarini and goes into ecstasy

While watching Mother Kali's arati with the devotees, Thakur goes into ecstasy. He is not able to salute Her by prostrating before Her. With great care he returns to his room with the devotees and sits down. He is still in ecstasy and talks to them in that state.

Hari, Mukherji's relative, must be eighteen to twenty years old. He is already married. For the time being he is living with the Mukherjis while he looks for work. He has great love for Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna and initiation into mantra – Sri Ramakrishna's promise to a devotee

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hari, in the same ecstatic mood*): "You must take initiation after you've gotten your mother's permission. (*To Priya*) I couldn't initiate him (Hari), though I told him I would – I don't give initiation. You continue with japa and meditation just as you have been doing."

Priya: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And I am telling you in this state of mind – you must believe me. You see, there is no pretense here. I said to the Divine Mother in this state, 'Mother, make perfect those who come here by sincere attraction.'"

Mahendra Kaviraj of Sinthi is sitting on the verandah with Ramlal, Hazra, and others. Thakur calls to him from his room, "Mahendra, Mahendra."

M. goes out quickly and brings the Kaviraj to him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the Kaviraj*): "Please sit down and listen for a while."

The Kaviraj sits down, somewhat embarrassed, and then he starts listening to Thakur's sweet words.

Various approaches to God – Balaram's attitude – three states of Gauranga

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "God can be approached many ways.

"A loving devotee can enjoy His presence in different ways. Sometimes he thinks of Him as a lotus and himself a bee; at other times he sees Him as Sat-chit-ananda and himself as a fish.

"He may also say to Him, 'I am your dancing girl,' and then sing and dance before Him. Sometimes he assumes the attitude of a gopi friend and sometimes that of a handmaid. Sometimes he feels a mother's love for Him like Yashoda's. And then sometimes he has the attitude of a husband or a lover like the gopis.

"Balaram would sometimes think of Him as a friend and at other times he would say, 'I am Krishna's sunshade or a seat for Him to sit upon.' He served Him all different ways."

Is Thakur talking about his own state by describing that of a loving devotee? And again, when he describes the three states of Chaitanya Deva, perhaps he is giving us a hint of his own.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Chaitanya Deva experienced three states. In the innermost state, he was absorbed in samadhi, with no outer consciousness. In the semiconscious state, he would dance in

ecstasy but would not speak. When in outward consciousness, he would sing songs of devotion.

(*To the devotees*) "You people listen to all these things – but try to put them into practice. When a worldly-minded man goes to see a sadhu, he hides all worldly thoughts and worries. After leaving, he takes them out again. A pigeon eats dried peas. It seems that he has digested them but actually he retains them in his crop. You can feel them there."

Evening worship – Sri Ramakrishna and Islam – japa and meditation

"Leaving all work aside, you should call on God at dusk. The feeling of God comes to mind in darkness. Only a little while ago you could see everything. You think, Who has done all this? You know, Muslims stop all work at appointed times and offer prayers.[1]"

Mukherji: "Sir, is it good to practice japa?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, by repeating God's name, you can realize Him. When you secretly repeat His name in solitude, God's grace dawns on you, and it is followed by His vision.

"Imagine a thick log of wood lying under water. It is tied to the bank with a chain. If you proceed from one link to the next, you will at last reach the log and touch it.

"Japa is higher than worship, and meditation is higher than repetition of the name. Higher than meditation is ecstasy. Chaitanya Deva experienced

1. Namaz.

prema. When you attain prema, you have the cord to tie God with."

Hazra comes in and sits down.

Passionate love for God, Sri Ramakrishna and repetition of the name on a rosary – Narayan

(*To Hazra*) "Real love for God is passionate.[1] Ritualistic devotion[2] leaves the devotee as fast as it comes. Passionate love for God is like the self-created stone lingam rising out of the earth. It's impossible to find its source. The root of the self-born lingam goes as far as Kashi. Only incarnations of God and their apostles experience such passionate love."

Hazra: "Ah!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "One day you were doing japa. Returning from answering the call of nature, I said, 'Mother, what a small mind. He's counting beads on a rosary even after coming here.' Whoever comes here will gain enlightenment at once. He doesn't have to do much counting of beads and performing other practices like it. When you go to Calcutta, you see thousands of people counting beads, even prostitutes."

Sri Ramakrishna now says to M.: "Please bring Narayan here in a carriage. I have told him (Mukherji) about Narayan. When he comes, I want to give him some refreshments. Feeding has great meaning."

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1. Raga bhakti.
2. Vaidhi bhakti.

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna with Brahmo devotees at Nabin Sen's house in Calootola – in the joy of devotional singing

It is Saturday today, Kojagar Purnima.[1] Thakur has come to Calootola, to the house of the late Nabin Sen, the eldest brother of Keshab Sen. It is 4 October 1884, the 19th of Ashwin, 1291 B.Y.

The previous Thursday, Keshab's mother had come to invite Thakur and pressed him to come.

Thakur goes to the outer room upstairs and takes his seat. Nandalal and other nephews of Keshab, Keshab's mother, and their relatives and friends serve Thakur with great reverence. Kirtan was to be held in the room. Many ladies of the Sen families of Calootola have arrived.

Thakur is accompanied by Baburam, Kishori, and a few other devotees. M. has arrived. Sitting in a room downstairs, he is listening to the sweet kirtan of Thakur.

Thakur says to the Brahmo devotees, "The world is transitory; one must always remember death."

Now he sings:

Consider this, O mind: no one is your own. In this world you roam about in vain.

Do not forget the beneficent Mother or be ensnared in maya's net,

Think of those over whom you fret almost unto death: in death would they accompany you?

1. The night of the full moon of Ashwin in which Goddess Lakshmi is worshipped. It falls in the bright fortnight of the lunar month.

Even your beloved wife would deny you and shun your corpse as something impure.

Just for a day or two do people call you lord and master; they will cease to call you so when the master called Death arrives for you.

Thakur says, "Dive deep. What use is swimming on the surface? Giving up everything else, go to a solitary place for few days and call upon Him with one hundred percent of your mind."

Thakur sings again:

Dive deep, dive deep, O my mind, into the ocean of beauty, and to the deepest depths descend: there you will find the gem of Love.[1]

Go seek, go seek, O mind, the blessed Vrindavan within your heart, the abode of the Lord of Love. Then in your heart the unceasing light of knowledge will ever shine.

Who is it that steers your boat over solid ground? It is your guru, says Kabir. Listen, and meditate on his holy feet.

He asks the Brahmo devotees to sing the song, "You are my all in all."

O Lord, the source of my life-breath, the essence of all essences, You are my all in all.

Besides You, there is none in the three worlds whom I can call my own.

Thakur himself sings:

Where have You hidden the form that Yashoda, making you dance, called her precious blue jewel?[2] Where have You, O Mother of gaping mouth,[3] hidden that form?

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1. Prema.
2. Nilmani.
3 Karalavadini, an epithet of Kali.

As the sun would sink in the sky, Yashoda, growing restless, would entreat You, Gopala, to come and partake of milk, cream, and butter.

She would tie Your disheveled hair into a bun,

And You would dance, bent thrice,[1] with Sridama.

The sweet jingle of Your anklets could be heard sounding to the beat of a drum, 'Ta thaiya, ta thaiya,'

Whereupon the women of Vraja would come running.

O Mother, play that sweet melody upon Your flute,

That music which caused the gopis to forget themselves and drew the cows home from pasture,

That music which turned upstream the Jamuna's flow.

Having cast off Your garland of skulls, You danced in Vraja with wild flowers adorned,

And having transformed Shiva into Balaram, you danced, relinquishing the sword and taking to the flute.

Pray dance, O Mother, in the same way, in the same form, once again.

Hearing this song, Keshab has new words composed. The Brahmo devotees sing the melody of that same song in accompaniment with the drum and cymbals:

O Mother, how great is Your love for Your children!

At the very thought of it, tears of joy stream from my eyes.

They sing again of the Divine Mother:

O Mother, as the Inner Controller![2] You are awake within, day and night.

Day and night You hold me in Your lap.

Next they sing:

1. Tribhangi, referring to a posture of Krishna.
2. Antaryamin.

O my mind! Why do you worry so, like a lowly beggar?

My Mother is Ishwari, the ruler of the universe, the all-protecting giver of spiritual perfection

Thakur now chants the names of Hari and Gauranga and dances with the Brahmo devotees. The kirtan continues with six songs:

O man, if you wish to live happily, love the sweet name of Hari …

The wave of Gaur's love has touched my body;[1]

By its thunder all heretics are crushed and the universe is submerged.

O Bharati, give me a loin cloth. I wish to go to Vraja disguised as a beggar …

Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers, are so full of compassion, O Lord!

My Gaur dances singing Hari's name.[2]

And finally:

Go, Madhai, and find out who goes there singing, 'Haribol, Haribol.'

Is it my Gaur who is going? Or is it Nitai?

They who wear gold anklets on their feet?

They with shaven heads and tattered cloths?

They who behave like madmen?

The Brahmo devotees sing again:

When will love enter me?

And then:

When will dawn that day when tears stream from my eyes as I repeat Lord Hari's name?[3]

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1. For the complete song, refer to Volume II, Section XVI, Chapter I.
2. For the complete song refer to Section XVII, Chapter I.
3. For the complete song refer to Section XIII, Chapter III.

Thakur sings in a loud voice and dances:

Behold, the brothers have come! The two who shed tears while chanting Hari's name.

They, who weeping, make others weep;

They, who in ecstasy dancing, make the world dance;

They, who receiving the world's blows, offer Hari's love.

Then he sings:

Behold, the whole of Nadia trembles under the waves of Gauranga's love!

Thakur chants the Divine Mother's name.

Don't steal away my joy, O Mother, You who are the source of all joy.

The Brahmos sing two of their own songs, first:

O Mother, make me mad with Your love.[1]

And then:

In the firmament of wisdom, the moon of divine love rises full.[2]

1. For the complete song refer to Section XIX, Chapter III.
2. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section I, Chapter II.

Section XXII

Sri Ramakrishna with Baburam, Nilkantha, M., Manomohan, and Other Devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

Hazra Mahashay – spontaneous love for God

Sri Ramakrishna is seated in his room at the Dakshineswar Temple with devotees after the midday meal. Near him are M., Hazra, the elder Kali, Baburam, Ramlal, and Hari, who is related to the Mukherjis. Some devotees are seated on the floor, others are standing. In response to the invitation of Keshab's mother, Thakur visited the Sen's Calcutta house the previous day and made everyone happy with his devotional songs.[1]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hazra*): "Yesterday I had a very good meal at Nabin Sen's house. It was served with great devotion."

Hazra and the knowledge of Ultimate Reality[2] – Hazra and his tendency to reason

Hazra has been living with Thakur for quite some time. He has a streak of pride, thinking that he is a jnani. He even criticizes Thakur in the presence of other people. On the other hand, he sits on an asana in the verandah and tells his beads with full concentration. He thinks of Chaitanya Deva as a

1. Accordingly, today is 5 October 1884.
2. Tattvajnana.

modern incarnation of God, but not one of great significance. He says, "It is not that God only grants pure love and devotion. He has no dearth of riches. He also grants wealth. When one attains Him, one also gets the eight occult powers." Hazra has incurred a debt on his house, about a thousand rupees, and is worried about paying it.

The elder Kali works in an office and receives a small salary. He has a family with children. He is greatly devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and often visits him, sometimes absenting himself from the office.

The elder Kali (*to Hazra*): "You go about testing people, like a touchstone, to find out which is pure gold and which is impure. Why do you run others down?"

Hazra: "Whatever remarks I make, I say in front of him."[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's true."

Hazra explains the meaning of the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality.

Hazra: "Knowledge of the Ultimate Reality means the knowledge of the twenty-four cosmic principles."

A devotee: "What are the twenty-four cosmic principles?"

Hazra: "The five gross elements, the six enemies [or passions], the five organs of perception, the five organs of action, and so on."

1. Meaning Sri Ramakrishna.

M. (*to Thakur, smiling*): "He says that the six enemies[1] are included in the twenty-four cosmic principles."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Just see what he says about the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality, or tattvajnana. Notice that. Knowledge of the Ultimate Reality means knowledge of the Self. *Tat* means the Supreme self, *tvam* means the individual self. The embodied soul and the Supreme Self are one and the same. Knowing this is the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality, or tattvajnana."

After a while, Hazra rises and goes out of the room to sit on the verandah.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "He only argues. For a moment he understands it very well, but in no time he becomes as ignorant as before.

"When I see a big fish pulling the line hard, I release it. If I didn't do that, the fish would break it. And the person holding the cord would fall into the water. That's why I don't say anything more."

Hazra, salvation, and the six divine glories[2] – selfish devotion versus motiveless love for God

(*To M.*) "Hazra says that you can attain liberation only if you are born a brahmin. I said, 'What do you mean? Liberation can be achieved by love for God alone.' Shavari was the daughter of a hunter. She, Ruhidas, and others, at whose meal time bells rang, were shudras. They attained

1. Lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride and envy.
2. Wisdom (jnana), power (shakti), strength (bala), lordship (aishvarya), valor (virya), and splendour (tejas).

liberation through love for God alone. Hazra says, 'But still…'

"He recognizes Dhruva. But not as much as Prahlada. When Latu said, 'How great a love for God Dhruva had during his childhood!' he remained silent.

"I say there is nothing higher than love for God untainted by desire. He contradicts this. A rich man is annoyed when a person comes to him asking for things. Irritated, he says, 'Here he comes!' When he comes in, the rich man says to him with irritation, 'Sit down.' He shows his annoyance. He doesn't take anybody in his carriage who demands anything of him.

"Hazra says, 'God isn't a rich person like that. Does He lack wealth that He would suffer any hardship to give it away?'

"Hazra says something else, 'When it rains, the Ganges and all the other big rivers and lakes swell with water; even pits and ponds are filled. When God's grace dawns, He grants not only love and devotion, but also wealth.'

"But this is tainted devotion. There is no desire in pure love. You want nothing from here [me], you only like to hear my talk when you meet me. My mind is also drawn to you: How is he, why hasn't he come? I have such anxiety about you.

"You want nothing, but still you love God. This is called motiveless love for God. This is pure love. Prahlada had it. He didn't want the kingdom, he didn't care for riches. He only wanted the Lord."

M.: "Hazra chats away incessantly. He isn't going to achieve anything unless he keeps his mouth shut."

Hazra's pride and fault-finding

Sri Ramakrishna: "Now and again he becomes very humble when he comes near me. But such are his stars that he soon begins to argue again. It is very difficult to get rid of pride. Cut down an ashwattha tree, and tomorrow you will see a shoot sprouting from it. As long as it has roots, the tree will sprout again and again.

"I say to Hazra, 'Don't find fault with people.'

"It is Narayana (God) who dwells in all these different forms. Even evil-doers can be worshiped.

"Just consider the worship of the Divine Mother in the form of a young unmarried girl.[1] Why worship a girl who has physical limitations and a runny nose? You do so because she also is a form of the Mother of the Universe.

"God dwells in His devotee in a special way. A devotee is the living room of God.

"The bigger the gourd, the better the tanpura you can make. It sounds better. (*Smiling, to Ramlal*) Oh, Ramlal, how did Hazra say that in Sanskrit, 'Antis bahis yadi Haris!'[2] It is like someone saying, 'Matram khatram.[3] (The mother is eating).' (*Everyone laughs.*)

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1. Kumari puja.
2. He quoted ungrammatically.
3. Ramakrishna made fun of the quote with his own outrageous Sanskrit composition.

Ramlal (*smiling*): "What is the use of austerity if God is seen inside as well as out?"[1]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Practice this, and repeat it to me often."

Thakur's plate is missing from his room. Ramlal and Brinde, the maid, are asking about it, "Do you know anything about the plate?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Where? I don't see it anywhere. It was here before. I saw it."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with two sadhus – Thakur's paramahamsa state

Two sadhu guests arrived today at the panchavati. They are studying the Gita, Vedanta, and some other scriptures. After their midday meal, they have come to see Thakur. He is sitting on his smaller cot. Bowing to him, the sadhus sit on a mat on the floor. M. and other devotees are also there. Thakur talks to them in Hindi.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Have you eaten?"

Sadhu: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What did you eat?"

Sadhu: "Chapattis and lentils. Would you like some?"

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1. antarbahiryadi haris tapasā tataḥ kim.

The sadhu and work without expectation of reward – desire for love of God – Vedanta – So 'ham and the householder

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, I only eat a little rice. So, you repeat God's name and meditate. You do it without expecting any reward, don't you?"

Sadhu: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's good. Besides that, you should offer the results to God. Don't you agree?"

Sadhu (*to the other sadhu*) –

yat karoṣi yad aśnāsi yaj juhoṣi dadāsi yat ।

yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kuruṣva madarpaṇam ।।

[Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give away, whatever austerity you practice, O son of Kunti, do it as an offering to Me.]

– Bhagavad Gita 9:27

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you offer God something, you receive it back a thousandfold. So after performing all your duties, offer them to Him with water in your cupped palm, surrendering the fruit of the actions to Krishna.[1]

"When Yudhisthira was about to offer all his sins to Krishna, someone (Bhima) warned him, 'Please don't do such a thing. What you offer to Krishna, you will receive back a thousand times.' Well, one should work without expectation of any reward – renouncing all desires. Isn't it so?"

Sadhu: "Yes, sir."

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1 Reference to ritualistic worship.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, I have the desire to love God. That's not bad – actually it's good. Eating sweets isn't good – they bring indigestion – but sugar candy is beneficial."

Sadhu: "Yes, sir!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well my dear, what is Vedanta?"

Sadhu: "The six systems of philosophy comprise Vedanta."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But the essence of Vedanta is that Brahman is real and the world an illusion. I am not separate from anything, I am that same Brahman. What do you think?"

Sadhu: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But for those who live a worldly life and think they are the body, the attitude of So 'ham – I am That – is not right. The Vedanta or the Yogavasishtha is not for householders. They can indeed be harmful. The householder should live in the attitude of the master and the servant: 'O God! You are the Lord, the Master; I am Your slave, Your servant.' It's not good for those who consider themselves the body to cherish the attitude 'I am He.'"

Everyone remains silent. Thakur smiles a little, as though to himself – he rejoices in the Self.[1]

One sadhu whispers to the other, "Look, look at this. This is called the state of a paramahamsa."

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1. Atmarama.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M., looking at him*): "I feel like laughing."

Thakur laughs a little to himself, like a child.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and women – hard rules for sannyasins

His earlier story – desire to visit his father-in-law's house – meeting with Vamandas of Ulo

The sadhus leave.

Thakur, Baburam, M., Hari of the Mukherjis, and other devotees are strolling in the room and on the verandah outside.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Did you go to Nabin Sen's house?"

M.: "Yes, sir. I did go. I sat downstairs and heard the songs."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Good that you went. Your wife went too. Wasn't Keshab Sen her uncle's[1] son?"

M.: "A distant relative."

Nabin Sen and his family are related to the in-laws of a devotee.

Thakur talks to Mani privately as they stroll around.

Sri Ramakrishna: "People visit their father-in-law's house. I thought so often: I shall also marry,

1. The son of her father's younger brother.

fulfill my desire [of going to father-in-law's home], and enjoy myself. But what has happened?"

Mani: "Sir, 'If the son holds his father's hand, he can fall down. But if the father holds his hand, he cannot fall.' You yourself said so. This is exactly your state: the Divine Mother is holding your hand."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I met Vamandas of Ulo at Vishwas's house. I said, 'I have come to see you.' When I left, I heard him say, 'Good gracious, the Lord is holding him the way a tiger seizes his prey.' I was young then, rather stout, and always in divine ecstasy.

"I am very afraid of women. I feel as if a tigress is coming to devour me. I see their bodies, limbs, and even pores are very big, like those of an ogress.

"Earlier I was very frightened. I wouldn't let anybody come near me. But now, having assured myself in various ways, I see each one of them as different forms of the All-Blissful Mother.

"They are the parts of the Mother of the Universe. But they have to be renounced by a man who is a sadhu or a devotee.

"However great a devotee a woman may be, I don't let her sit near me for long. I say to her after a while, 'Go see the deity.' If she doesn't rise even after this, I go out of the room on the pretext of having a smoke.

"I find that some people don't have the least interest in women. Niranjan says, 'My mind isn't drawn to a woman in the least.'"

Hari Babu, Niranjan, Pande, a brahmin from western India, and Jaynarayan

"I asked Hari (the brother of Doctor Upen) about women. He also said, 'No, I don't feel drawn to them.'

"The mind which should have been given to the Lord – seventy-five percent of it is taken away by women. And after a son is born, almost the whole of the mind goes to the family. Then what can you give to God?

"And some get thoroughly exhausted in guarding their wives. There is an aged gate-keeper brahmin from western India, Pande. He had a fourteen year old wife. She had to live with this old man. They lived in a thatched house. People made holes in the dry leaves to peep inside. Now she has run away.

"Another man couldn't decide where to keep his wife. There was a lot of trouble at home. He was so worried. It is better not to talk about it.

"If you live with a woman, you come under her control. Worldly people stand up when asked by their wives and sit down at their bidding. They speak highly of the wife.

"I wanted to go to a certain place. When I asked Ramlal's aunt,[1] she forbade me and I couldn't go. In a little while, I said to myself, 'Oh, I don't live a householder's life. I have renounced "lust and greed," and yet this happens.' How very much

1. Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna's wife.

worldly people must be under the control of their wives."

Mani: "If you live amidst 'lust and greed,' you can't escape being scorched a little by them. You told us about a big pundit named Jaynarayan. You went to see him when he was old. Even he was putting pillows and other things out to dry in the sun."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But he had no pride of his scholarship. And, just as he had said he would, he lived his last days in Kashi, following the injunctions of the scriptures.

"I saw his sons. They were English-educated and wore English boots on their feet."

Different states of Thakur in divine intoxication

Thakur is explaining to Mani about his own state by means of putting questions to him.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I used to have a great madness for God. Why is it diminished now? But I get in that state now at times."

Mani: "You are not always in the same mood. As you said, sometimes you are childlike, sometimes like a mad man, sometimes like an inanimate object, and sometimes like a ghoul. You have all these states at times. And now and then you are in a natural state."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, like a child. And sometimes I have moods of boyhood and also of youth – I have all these states. When I give instruction, I feel like a young man.

"And in a boyish mood, I feel like playing and having fun like a boy of twelve or thirteen. That's why I joke and banter with the youngsters."

Qualities of Narayan – renunciation of 'lust and greed' is the difficult austerity of the sannyasin

"Well, what do you think of Narayan?"

Mani: "He has good signs, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "A good gourd shell makes a good tanpura.

"He says to me, 'You are everything (that is, an incarnation of God).' He says that from his own comprehension. Others say, 'He is just a sadhu, a devotee of God.'

"He grasps very well what I forbid him to do. But when I told him to roll up the curtain, he didn't do it. I forbade him to do these: tie a knot, sew, roll up curtains, lock a door or a box with a key. He understood them well. All such disciplines are necessary for one who wishes to renounce. All these disciplines are for sannyasins.

"In the stage of spiritual practices, one should think of a woman as a forest fire! Or a black cobra! In the state of perfection, after God-realization, one sees woman as the All-Blissful Mother. One then looks at each as a different aspect of the Divine Mother."

Many days ago, Thakur had warned Narayan very seriously about women. He said, "Do not let the breeze from a woman's body touch you. Cover yourself with a thick sheet so the air will not touch you. And except for your mother, keep a distance of

eight cubits, or two cubits, or at least one cubit away from women."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Narayan's mother said to him about me, 'We are so charmed by the sight of him, not to speak of you, just a child.' You cannot realize God without being guileless. How guileless Niranjan is!"

Mani: "Yes, sir."

Are Niranjan and Narendra guileless?

Sri Ramakrishna: "Didn't you notice him that day in the carriage going to Calcutta? He is always the same – guileless. Usually people show one side of themselves at home and quite another outside. Narendra is worried about his family (since the death of his father). He has a somewhat calculating mind. Are all youngsters like them?"

Sri Ramakrishna in Nabin Niyogi's house – musical performance of Nilkantha

"I went today to Dakshineswar to see the musical performance of Nilkantha in Nabin Niyogi's house. The boys there are very bad. Always finding fault. First with this person, then another. At such a place, one's spiritual moods are checked.

"That day I saw Doctor Madhu shedding tears during the play. I couldn't turn my eyes away from him."

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna, Keshab and the Brahmo Samaj – instructions on harmony – universal, catholic church of Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Well, so many people are attracted here. What does it mean?"

Mani: "I am reminded of Sri Krishna's divine sport in Vraja. When he turned himself into the cowherd boys and the calves, the gopis were drawn more strongly to the cowherd boys, the cows felt more attracted to the calves."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is the attraction of God. You know how? The Divine Mother casts a spell that attracts people.

"You see, many people used to visit Keshab Sen. Not so many come here. What great respect people have for Keshab! He is known even in the West. The queen [Victoria] talked to him. The Gita also says that there is more divine power in a person who is respected by many. That many people do not visit here."

Mani: "Worldly people visited Keshab Sen."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, that is true. The worldly-minded went to him."

Mani: "Will the work done by Keshab Sen last?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why, he has written a samhita. It contains many rules of conduct."

Mani: "It is quite different from the work of an incarnation of God – for example, Chaitanya Deva."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, yes. Right."

Mani: "You have told us that Chaitanya Deva said, 'The seed I have broadcast will one day bear fruit.' A seed was placed on the cornice of a house. The house fell and that seed produced a tree."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Shivanath and his friends have also founded a samaj. Many people go there too."

Mani: "Sir, that sort of man goes there."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "Yes, yes. Only worldly people go there. But not many of those who yearn for God and are trying to renounce 'lust and greed.'"

Mani: "It will really be nice if a current flows from here. Everyone will be liberated by the force of that current. What comes from here will never be one-sided."

Sri Ramakrishna and Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Vaishnavas, and Brahmos

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "I accept the ideal that anyone may have. I ask Vaishnavas to preserve Vaishnava inclinations; I ask Shaktas to preserve theirs. But I tell them, 'Don't think that only your faith is true and all else are false or wrong.' Hindus, Muslims, Christians – they are all going to the same goal by different paths. Preserving your own inclination and calling upon God earnestly, you will realize Him.

"Vijay's mother-in-law said, 'Why don't you tell Balaram and the others that it is not necessary to

worship God with form, that you can succeed by calling on the formless Sat-chit-ananda only?'

"I said, 'Why should I say such a thing to them? Besides why would they listen to me?'

"A mother has cooked fish. For one of the sons, she has made pulao. For one who can't digest well, she has prepared fish curry. One should make different forms of the same thing according to the tastes and capabilities of others."

Mani: "Yes, sir. There are different paths for different times, places, and people. But whatever path one may chose, He can be reached by calling upon Him sincerely with a pure mind. This is what you have been saying."

Hari of the Mukherji family – Sri Ramakrishna on meditation and charity

Thakur is sitting in his room. Hari, the Mukherjis' relative, M., and others are seated on the floor. An unknown person comes in and bows to Thakur, then takes a seat. Talking of him later, Thakur said, "His eyes were not good. They were yellow, like a cat's."

Hari prepares a smoke for Thakur and brings it to him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*holding the hubble-bubble in his hand, to Hari*): "Let me see your palm. All these lines are very good signs.

"Now relax your hand and let me examine it. (*He holds Hari's hand in his own, as if he is weighing it*). You are still childlike. Nothing has

gone wrong yet. (*To the devotees*) By seeing a person's hand, I can tell whether he is crooked or guileless. (*To Hari*) Why, go to your in-laws' house and talk to your wife. Have a little fun with her if you like.

(*To M.*) "What do you say to that, my dear?" (*M. and others laugh.*)

M.: "Sir, if a new pot goes bad, you can't keep milk in it."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "How do you know that it has not already gone bad?"

Mahendra and Priyanath are the two Mukherji brothers. They do not work in an office; they have their own flour mill. Priyanath had been an engineer. Thakur talks to Hari about the Mukherji brothers.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hari*): "The elder brother [Mahendra] is nice, isn't he? He's guileless."

Hari: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "The younger one [Priyanath] is very miserly. He has, though, improved a lot since coming here. Once he said to me, 'I didn't know anything before.' (*To Hari*) Do they give in charity?"

Hari: "I don't see them doing anything like that. They had an elder brother – he's dead now – who was a very good man. He was engaged in charity as well as meditation."[1]

1. In Bengali, *dan* (giving) and *dhyan* (meditation).

Sri Ramakrishna and signs of the body – the student of Mahesh Nyaya Rattan

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and others*): "You can know a lot by signs on the body – whether a person will succeed or not. Crooked people have heavy hands.

"A snub nose is not good. Sambhu had a snub nose. That's why he was not totally guileless in spite of his great knowledge.

"A weak rib cage, hard bones, thick elbow joints, thin hands, and yellowish eyes like a cat's – these are not good signs.

"Thick lips like those of a dome[1] indicate low intelligence. A brahmin was here acting as priest for the Vishnu Temple. I couldn't eat the food he had touched. One day I exclaimed, 'Oh, a dome!' Later he told me, 'I live in the dome quarters. I know how to weave baskets and utensils just like the domes.'

"And there are other bad signs – a man with one eye or with a squint. But it's better to be one-eyed than to have a squint. Squint-eyed people are cruel and deceitful.

"A student of Mahesh (the late Mahesh Nyaya Rattan) said, 'I am an atheist.' He said to Hriday, 'Let's have a discussion. I am an atheist and you consider yourself a theist.' I had a good look at him then. He had eyes like a cat.

"Whether someone is good or bad is shown by the way he walks.

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1. People of a specific low caste.

"If a man's foreskin has been cut, as Muslims do, it is a particularly bad sign. (*M. and others laugh.*) (*To M., smiling*) You must see that it is a bad sign." (*All laugh.*)

Thakur is pacing the verandah. M. and Baburam are with him.

(*To Hazra*) "A person came here. I noticed that he had eyes like a cat. He asked me, 'Do you know astrology? I am in some trouble.' I replied, 'No. Go to Baranagore. You will find an astrologer there.'"

Baburam and M. are talking about Nilkantha's theatrical performance. Baburam had returned from Nabin Sen's house to Dakshineswar and spent last night here. In the morning he had seen the Nilkantha play at Nabin Niyogi's house in Dakshineswar.

Sri Ramakrishna, Mani, and contemplation in solitude – God's will – longing for Narayan

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and Baburam*): "What are you talking about?"

M. and Baburam: "Sir, we are talking about Nilkantha's musical and the song: 'Living on the bank of the river with hope at the feet of Mother Shyama.'"

While pacing the verandah, Thakur suddenly takes Mani aside and says to him, "The less people know about your meditation on God the better for you." Saying this, Thakur suddenly leaves.

He is now talking to Hazra.

Hazra: "Nilkantha told you that he would come visit you. We should send for him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No. He didn't sleep last night. It would be different if he came by God's will."

Thakur is proceeding toward the jhautala, accompanied by M. and Baburam. He asks Baburam to go and visit Narayan in his house. He thinks of Narayan as the very manifestation of God, so he is yearning to see him. He says to Baburam, "When you go, take an English textbook with you."

Chapter V

Dakshineswar – Thakur with Nilkantha and other devotees, enjoying devotional singing

Sri Ramakrishna is seated in his room. At about three o'clock Nilkantha arrives with six or seven companions. Thakur, who is facing east, gets up and goes toward the door to welcome them. They enter through the eastern door and salute him by prostrating.

Thakur goes into samadhi. Baburam is behind him; M., Nilkantha, Haran, and others belonging to the theatrical performance are in front of him. Dinanath, the treasurer of the temple, looks at Thakur from the north side of the bed. Soon the room is filled with employees of the temple garden. After some time Thakur's ecstatic mood diminishes and he sits on a mat spread on the floor. Nilkantha sits in front of him and the other devotees around.

Sri Ramakrishna (*in an ecstatic mood*): "I'm all right."

Nilkantha (*with folded hands*): "Please make me all right also."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "But you are already all right. If you add *a* to *k* it becomes *ka*. What use is there in adding another *a* to it – it will still remain *ka*. (*Everybody laughs.*)

Nilkantha: "I am entangled in worldly life."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "You have been kept in the world for the sake of others.

"There are the eight bonds. You can't get rid of them all. God keeps you bound by one or two for teaching others. You are performing this musical play. How many people benefit by seeing your love and devotion for God! If you were to give up all this, what would happen to the other performers?

"He is getting His work done through you. When you have finished it, you will not return. A housewife finishes all her domestic chores – feeds everybody, even the maids and servants – and then goes for her bath. Then even if you shout for her, she doesn't return."

Nilkantha: "Please bless me."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Going mad at separation from Krishna, Yashoda went to see Radha, who was meditating. In ecstasy, she said to Yashoda, 'I am that Primeval Power, the fundamental Prakriti. Ask me for a boon.' Yashoda said, 'What boon shall I ask? Just grant that I be able to serve Him and meditate on Him in body, mind, and speech. That

my ears may hear of His name and glories, that my hands may serve Him and His devotees, and that my eyes may see His form and His devotees.'

"Your eyes fill with tears when you recite His name. What remains for you to worry about? You have already developed love for Him.

"Knowing many things is ignorance. Knowing only One is knowledge. In other words, God alone is real and dwells in all. Talking to Him is vijnana – attaining Him and loving Him in various ways is vijnana.

"Besides, He is beyond one or two – beyond speech and mind. To go from the phenomenal to the Absolute and then return to the relative from the Absolute is called mature love for God.

"That song of yours is beautiful: 'Living on the bank of the river with hope at the feet of Mother Shyama.'

"You succeed if this happens. It all depends on God's grace.

"So you have to pray to Him. Simply sitting quietly will not do. After pleading the whole case, the lawyer says to the judge, 'This is all I have to say.' It is now all in your hands."

After a while Thakur says, "You sang so much in the morning and now you have taken the trouble of coming here. But it is all honorary – free – here."

Nilkantha: "Why?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "I understand what you mean."

Nilkantha: "I shall carry away a priceless jewel from here!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That precious jewel is already with you. What is the use of adding another *a* to *k*? If you didn't already have it, why should I have liked your songs so much? Ramprasad was a realized soul.

"An ordinary being is called manushya, or man. One whose consciousness is awakened is called manhosha, or an awakened mind.[1] You are manhosha.

"I had already planned to go to the play when I heard that you were going to sing. Just then Niyogi came to invite me."

Thakur goes to the smaller cot and sits down. He says to Nilkantha, "I would like to hear a song or two about the Divine Mother."

Nilkantha sings with his companions:

Living on the bank of the river with hope at the feet of Mother Shyama.

Next they sing:

Mahishamardini…

Listening to this song, Thakur stands up and goes into samadhi.

Nilkantha says, "He from whose locks the Ganges is flowing has Rajarajeshvari (the Supreme Goddess) residing in his heart."

Thakur dances in ecstatic love. Nilkantha and the devotees sing, encircling him, and also dance.

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1. There is pun on the word manhosha and manushya.

They sing:

Shiva, Shiva.

Thakur dances with devotees during this song as well.

The song ends. Thakur says to Nilkantha, "I want to hear the song I heard you sing in Calcutta."

M.: "Like Krishna's, the complexion of the handsome Sri Gauranga, the dancing lover of God, is of golden hue."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, yes."

Nilkantha sings:

Like Krishna's, the complexion of the handsome Sri Gauranga, the dancing lover of God, is of golden hue.[1]

When he sings, 'Drowning in the flood of ecstatic love,' Thakur again dances with the devotees. Whoever sees this superb dance will never forget it. The room is full of people, all filled with divine emotion. It has become like Srivasa's own courtyard.[2]

Manomohan goes into an ecstatic mood. A devotee of Thakur, he is related to Rakhal. A number of ladies of Manomohan's family have come with him and are watching the wonderful dance and kirtan from the northern verandah. One of the ladies there also goes into ecstasy.

Thakur sings another song:

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1. For the complete song refer to Section VIII, Chapter I.
2. Srivasa Pundit was a close companion of Sri Chaitanya. It was at his house that Chaitanya and his associates would have sankirtan all night long.

Behold, the brothers have come! The two who shed tears while chanting Hari's name.[1]

Thakur dances with Nilkantha and other devotees. He improvises the following line:

The two brothers have come intoxicated with Radha's love.

Hearing the loud music, people gather. They stand all around – on the south, on the north, and on the western semi-circular verandah. People in boats going by are also attracted by the sound of the sweet kirtan.

The singing ends. Thakur chants the name of the Mother of the Universe and says, "Bhagavata Bhakta Bhagavan [His word, His devotee, and the Lord are one]. My salutations to jnanis, salutations to yogis, and salutations to devotees."

Now Thakur goes to the western semi-circular verandah with Nilkantha and some other devotees. He sits there. It is evening, the day after the full moon of Kojagar. All quarters are lit up by the light of the moon. Thakur talks happily with Nilkantha.

What Sri Ramakrishna is – 'I' cannot be found by searching – I shall bring Chandi home

Nilkantha: "You yourself are indeed Gauranga."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What is all this? I am the servant of the servant of all. The wave belongs to the Ganges. Does the Ganges ever belong to the wave?"

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1. For the complete song refer to Section VI, Chapter I.

Nilkantha: "Whatever you may say, we see you as that [Gauranga]."

Sri Ramakrishna (*going into an ecstatic mood, sweetly*): "Brother, I search for my 'I,' but I cannot find it.

"Hanuman said to Rama, 'O Rama, sometimes I say to myself that You are the whole and I a part of you, sometimes that you are the Lord and I your servant. But when I have the knowledge of Reality I see that You are I and I am You.'"

Nilkantha: "What shall I say? Please grant us your grace."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "So many people are being taken across by you! How many people feel inspired by hearing your music!"

Nilkantha: "You are saying that I am taking them across. But please bless me that I myself may not be drowned."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "If you must drown yourself, do so in the lake of nectar."

Thakur is delighted to be in Nilkantha's company. He says to him again, "For you to come here! A person can meet you only after practicing great spiritual disciplines. But please listen to this song."

> O Giriraja, King of Mountains, my dear Ganesha is the harbinger of all blessedness.
>
> By worshiping him, Ganapati,[1] I have attained Your daughter, Haimavati.[2]

1. Ganesha.
2. The goddess Parvati.

O King of Mountains, please bring the brightly shining[1] Parvati to me.

In worship I shall invoke her under the vilva tree. And Gauri will descend here for the welfare of Ganesha.

As soon as Chandi[2] graces my house, so many songs of the Chandi[3] will be sung,

And saints and hermits and ascetics with matted locks will gather there.

"As soon as Chandi [the Divine Mother] graces the house, saints, ascetics with matted hair, and hermits will flock there."

Thakur laughs. After a while he says to M., Baburam and other devotees, "I feel like laughing and laughing. Just imagine that I should be singing for them (the musicians of the theater)!"

Nilkantha: "We have received today our reward for touring about singing."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "When a shopkeeper sells something, he sometimes offers a little extra. You sang at Nabin's and have given the little extra here." (*All laugh.*)

1. Gauri.
2. A name of the Divine Mother.
3. The Devimahatmya or Sri Durga Saptasati.

Section XXIII

Car Festival at Balaram's House

Chapter I

Purna, the younger Naren, and Gopal's Mother

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in Balaram's drawing room with the devotees. It is Monday, 13 July 1885, the first day of the bright fortnight of Ashada. It is nine o'clock.

Tomorrow the Car Festival will be celebrated. Balaram has invited Thakur for the celebration and brought him to his house. The image of Jagannath is worshiped there daily, and he has a small car which will be pulled on the verandah outside during the festival.

Thakur is talking with M. Close to them are Narayan, Tejchandra, Balaram, and many other devotees. They are talking about Purna. Purna is about fifteen years old. Thakur longs to see him.

Sri Ramakrishna (to M.): "Well, by what road will he come to see me? Please arrange that Dwija and Purna meet.

"I bring together two people of the same nature and same age. It has a special meaning. They both make progress. Do you see what love Purna has?"

M.: "Yes, sir. I was going by tram when he saw me from the roof of his house. He came running to see me and greeted me so eagerly!"

Sri Ramakrishna (*his eyes filled with tears*): "Ah! Ah! Because he has found me to be the contact for

spiritual illumination. Unless one has yearning for God, such conduct is not seen."

Purna's masculine nature – divine inclination – Narayana born as one's son because of austerities

"These three have a masculine nature: Narendra, the younger Naren, and Purna. But not Bhavanath. He has a feminine nature.

"Because of his high state, Purna may quit his body soon. Why retain the body after God-realization? Or the spiritual feelings within him may surge up in a few days.

"He has a divine inclination, the nature of a god. Such people don't have much fear of society. If a garland is put around his neck, sandal paste on his body, and incense burnt before him, he will go into samadhi. He will then know that God is within him, that Narayana Himself has come down in a human body. I've found this out."

His earlier story – samadhi of a brahmin girl with good signs – Mother Goddess as daughter of Ranjit

"When this state of divine intoxication came to me the first time in Dakshineswar, a brahmin lady belonging to a respectable family came. She had very good signs. As soon as a garland was put around her neck and incense burnt before her, she went into samadhi. Soon she was all joy. Tears began to stream from her eyes. I bowed to her and said, 'Mother, will I succeed?' She replied, 'Yes.'

"I want to see Purna again. But where is the opportunity? It seems that he is a part of the Divine.[1] What a wonder! Not just a tiny part, but a full sixteenth! How intelligent he is! He is so good in studies. Therefore I have hit it right.

"Narayana (the Lord) takes birth as a person's son by the power of spiritual practices. On the way to Kamarpukur, there is Ranjit Rai's big lake. The Divine Mother took birth as Ranjit Rai's daughter. Even now a fair is held there in the month of Chaitra. I've had a desire to go there – but not now.

"Ranjit Rai was a landlord there. By the power of his austerities, he obtained the Divine Mother as his daughter. He loved his daughter very much. She became so attached to him that she would almost never leave her father's company. One day, he was attending to the affairs of his estate and was very busy. The girl, in her childlike nature, continually asked him, 'Father, what is this and what is that?' The father very sweetly replied, 'Daughter, please leave me alone. I have lot of work to do.' But the girl would not leave. At last he said absent-mindedly, 'Please, get out of here.' On this pretext the girl left home. A peddler of conch-shell wares was just then passing by. She called out for him and took a pair of conch bangles. When he demanded to be paid for them, she said, 'There is money in a box in that room. Go and take it from there.' Then she left, never to be seen again. The bangle peddler went to the house and began to shout for money. Seeing that she was not at home,

1. One-sixteenth divine power (kala).

the inmates of the house came running. Ranjit Rai sent people in all directions to find her. The money owed the peddler was found in the box. Ranjit Rai was going around weeping when someone came and said, 'There is something in the lake.' They all went to the lake and saw a hand with a conch bangle raised out of the water. A moment later they could see it no more. Even now worship of the Divine Mother is performed during the festival on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra.

(*To M.*) "All this is true."

M.: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Narendra now believes this."

"Purna was born with an element of Vishnu. I worshiped him mentally with vilwa leaves[1] but it wasn't successful. Then I offered him tulsi leaves[2] and sandal paste and it was accepted.

"God appears in many ways, sometimes as a man and sometimes in other divine forms of consciousness. One must believe in divine forms. What do you say?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

Gopal's Mother has a motherly nature – she sees divine forms

Sri Ramakrishna: "The brahmin woman of Kamarhati (Gopal's Mother) sees so many visions! She lives by herself in a lone house in a garden on the bank of the Ganges and repeats God's name.

1. Traditionally offered to Shiva.
2.Traditionally offered to Vishnu.

Gopala[1] sleeps close to her. (*Saying this, Thakur gives a start.*) Not in imagination but in fact. She saw that Gopala's hands were red; he goes everywhere with her. She suckles him at her breast and talks to him. Narendra wept when he heard this!

"I also used to see many things. Now in ecstasy I don't see that many visions. My feminine nature is decreasing. Instead I am imbibing a manly attitude. That's why my spiritual feelings don't show so much outwardly. They remain within.

"The younger Naren has a masculine nature. That's why he becomes merged in meditation while repeating the name of God. He doesn't show ecstasy. Nityagopal has a feminine nature. That's why his body gets contorted in bhava. His body turns red with emotion."

Chapter II

Renunciation of "lust and greed" – Purna and others

Binode, Dwija, Tarak, Mohit, Tejchandra, Narayan, Balaram, and Atul

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Well, people renounce bit by bit. What about them?

"Binode said, 'I have to sleep with my wife. That makes me feel very bad.' You see, it is bad to sleep together whether you have intercourse or not. There is touching of the bodies and the physical warmth.

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1. Baby Krishna.

"What a state Dwija is in! He only sways his body and keeps is eyes focused on my face. Is that a small thing? If his whole mind becomes fixed on me, he will have achieved everything."

Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation of God?

"So what am I? It is He. I am the machine but He is the operator. It is God's power alone in this [within himself]. That's why so many people are increasingly attracted here. Just a touch is enough to awaken them. This attraction, this pull, is the attraction of God alone.

"Tarak (of Belgharia) was returning to his home after staying there (Dakshineswar). I noticed something shining like a flame coming out of this – and following him.

"A few days after that, Tarak returned (to Dakshineswar). Then He who is in this body put a foot on his chest in the state of samadhi.

"Well, are there any more boys like these youngsters?"

M.: "That boy Mohit is quite nice. He's gone to see you once or twice. He's preparing for two university examinations. And he has great attraction for God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Maybe so. But he doesn't have a high spiritual ideal. His physical signs aren't so good. He has a puggish face. These other youngsters are of a different class.

"Taking up a body puts one in great trouble. And if one is cursed, he will have to be born another seven times. You have to live very cautiously! A

person has to take up a new body if only one desire remains."

Devotee: "And incarnations of God, when they come in a human body – do they have any desire?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "I've noticed that I haven't been able to completely rid myself of desire. When I saw a sadhu's shawl, I wanted to wear one like it. Even now I have this desire. Maybe I'll have to come again."

Balaram (*smiling*): "Will you take up a human body just for a shawl?" (*Everyone laughs.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "A person should nourish a spiritual desire. They say that when you die, you will think only of it. Sadhus keep one of the four centers of pilgrimage[1] unvisited. Many keep the Jagannath region unvisited so that at the time of death, their thoughts will be in Jagannath."

A person dressed in monastic robes enters the room and salutes. Privately he runs Thakur down, so Balaram laughs. Thakur knows the inner thoughts of people, so he says to Balaram, "Let him be. Let him say that I am a fraud."

Tejchandra's proposal to renounce the world

Thakur is talking to Tejchandra.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Tejchandra*): "I have sent for you so many times! Why don't you come? All right, so just practice meditation. If you do that, I'll be happy. I look on you as my own. That's why I send for you."

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1. Dham.

Tejchandra: "Sir, I have to go to the office. There is a lot of work to do."

M. (*smiling*): "There was a marriage in the family and he took ten days off from the office."

Sri Ramakrishna: "So! And you say you don't have time. And you say you want to renounce the world."

Narayan: "One day Master Mahashay (M.) said that the world is a wilderness."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Please tell them that story. They will benefit from it. About the disciple becoming unconscious after he takes some medicine. The guru comes and says, 'His life can be saved if someone takes this pill. He will live but the person who takes the pill will die.'

"And tell that other one, too – about the hatha yogi with a crooked body who thought his wife and other members of the family were his very own."[1]

Thakur partakes of the prasad of Sri Jagannath at noon. Service to Jagannath is performed regularly at Balaram's house. That's why Thakur says, "Balaram's food is pure." Thakur takes a little rest after the meal.

It is late afternoon. Thakur is sitting with the devotees in the same room. Chandra Babu of the Kartabhaja sect and the witty brahmin are also there. This brahmin is a joker – whatever he says makes people laugh.

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1. For the complete story refer to Volume III, Section XV, Chapter I.

Thakur talks for a long time about the Kartabhajas and their outlook on life and religion.[1]

Thakur's ecstasy – Atul and Tejchandra's brother

It is six o'clock. Girish's brother, Atul, and Tejchandra's brother have come. Thakur is in an ecstatic state. After sometime he says, "Can one be unconscious by meditating on Consciousness? Can one go mad by meditating on God? He is the very nature of all knowledge. He is eternal, pure, knowledge itself."

Are some of the visitors thinking that Thakur's brain may have been deranged by excessive meditation on God?

Go forward – Krishnadhan's humour

Thakur says to Krishnadhan, the witty brahmin, "You waste your time joking day and night about ordinary worldly things. Turn your mind towards God. A person who can keep account of salt can also account for sugar candy."

Krishnadhan (*smiling*): "Please pull me that way."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What can I do? It all depends on your own effort. It is up to your own mind to do it.

"Giving up ordinary humour, go forward to God. You can go farther and farther. The brahmachari counseled the woodcutter to go forward. When he did, he found sandalwood, then a mine of silver,

1. Rupa, swarupa, raj, bij, and pak pranali.

and then a gold mine. Going even farther, he found diamonds and jewels."

Krishnadhan: "There is no end to this road."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Stop where you find peace."

Thakur now talks about a newcomer.

"I didn't find any substance in him. He seemed worthless, like a rotten apple."

It is evening. A light has been brought in the room. Thakur meditates on the Mother of the Universe and chants Her name in a sweet voice. The devotees are sitting all around him.

The Car Festival is to be held tomorrow. Thakur will spend tonight in this house. Taking some refreshments in the inner apartments, he returns again to the large room. It is about 10 p.m. He says to M., "Please bring the hand towel from the other room."

Thakur's bed has been made in the small room. It is ten-thirty when he goes to bed.

It is summer. He says to M., "Please bring a fan." He asks him to fan him. At twelve o'clock at night, Thakur wakes up. He says, "I feel chilly. I don't need the fan anymore."

Chapter III

Thakur with devotees in Balaram's house on the day of the Car Festival

Today is the day of the Car Festival – Tuesday [14 July 1885]. Rising very early in the morning,

Thakur dances by himself repeating the name of God in a sweet voice.

M. comes in and salutes him. The devotees arrive one by one, salute Thakur, and then sit near him. Thakur is very eager to see Purna. He talks to M. about Purna.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Did you give Purna any instructions when you saw him?"

M.: "Sir, I asked him to read the *Chaitanya Charitamrita.* He is familiar with it. And I told him that you had said, 'Always hold on to the truth.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, what did he say when you told him about me, saying, 'He is God incarnate?'"

M.: "I asked him to come with me if he wanted to see a man like Chaitanya Deva."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What else?"

M.: "That you said that when an elephant goes into a small pond, the water is splashed around – that if a receptacle is shallow, his emotions overflow.

"About his giving up of fish, I asked, 'Why this? It will cause a great uproar.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's good. A person must contain emotions within."

Sri Ramakrishna and the earthquake

It is half past six in the morning. M. is going for a dip in the Ganges from Balaram's house when he feels an earthquake. He immediately returns to

Thakur's room. Thakur is standing in the drawing room with the devotees talking about it. It was rather severe. Most of the devotees are frightened.

M.: "We should have gone downstairs."

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna and the storm of Ashwin – 5 October 1864

Sri Ramakrishna: "This is the pitiable state of the house [body] one lives in. And yet people are so arrogant! (*To M.*) Do you remember the storm in the month of Ashwin?"

M.: "Yes, sir. I was very young then, nine or ten years old. I was alone in a room, and I called on God."

Surprised, M. asks himself, Why has Thakur suddenly asked about the storm of Ashwin? Sitting alone in a room, I wept profusely and prayed to God. Does Thakur know everything about it? Is he reminding me of it? Has he been protecting me as my guru since my birth?

Sri Ramakrishna: "It was very late at Dakshineswar when the storm broke. Afterward some food was cooked, but it was very late. All the trees had been uprooted. You see, this is the fate of the house one lives in!

"But after gaining perfect knowledge, one feels that dying and killing are the same. When one dies nobody dies, and when one kills nobody is killed.[1] The phenomenal belongs to the same reality as the Absolute. It is He Himself who is the Absolute in

1. nāyaṁ hanti na hanyate – Bhagavad Gita, 2:19; na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre – Bhagavad Gita 2:20.

one form and the phenomenal in another. Even if the relative is destroyed, the Absolute exists. Water is water, whether it is moving or still."

Thakur sits again in the drawing room with the devotees. Mahendra Mukherji, Hari, the younger Naren, and several other young devotees are there. Hari[1] lives alone and studies Vedanta. He is twenty-three or twenty-four years old. He is not married. Thakur is very fond of him and often asks him to visit but since he likes solitude, he doesn't come very often.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hari*): "Well, my dear, you have not been here for a long time."

Advice to Hari– non-dualism[2] and qualified non-dualism[3] – vijnana

"In one form God is the Absolute and in another He is the phenomenal. What does Vedanta say? That Brahman is real[4] and the world illusory.[5] But as long as God keeps the feeling of I-ness in a devotee, the relative is real. When He takes it away, then whatever is remains. This cannot be explained in words. As long as He has kept I-ness in you, you have to accept everything. When the sheathes of the banana tree are peeled off, there is pulp inside. When there are sheathes, there is pulp – the pulp belongs to the sheathes and the sheathes belong to the pulp. When you speak of the existence of the Absolute, you comprehend that the

1. Harinath Chattopadhyaya, the future Swami Turiyananda.
2. Doctrine of Advaita.
3. Doctrine of Vishishtadvaita.
4. Permanent.
5. Impermanent.

phenomenal exists. And when you speak of the phenomenal, you understand that the Absolute also exists.

"God has become the world, its living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. When He is inactive, He is called Brahman. When He creates, preserves, and dissolves, He is known as Shakti, or Power. Brahman and Shakti are not different from each other. Water is water whether it is still or in motion.

"You cannot get rid of the sense of 'I.' You can't say that the world and its living beings are an illusion as long as you are conscious of your 'I.' When you throw away the rind and the seeds of a bel fruit, you can't arrive at the full weight of the bel fruit.

"The bricks, lime, and brick-dust with which the roof is made also make the stairs. It is only because of the reality of what is known as Brahman that this universe and its creatures have come into existence.

"The devotee, the vijnani, accepts both God with form and the formless God. He accepts both form and formlessness. It is by the cooling effect of love for God that some of the water turns into ice. But when the sun of spiritual knowledge rises, that ice melts into the same water as it was before."

When reasoning stops, the mind is annihilated and there is the knowledge of Brahman

"As long as a person reasons with the mind, the Absolute cannot be reached. As long as you reason

with the mind, the world cannot be done away with. None of the senses of sight, taste, smell, touch, and speech can be got rid off. When reasoning stops, you attain the knowledge of Brahman. You cannot know the Atman through this mind – Atman is known only through Atman. Pure mind, pure intellect, and pure Atman are one and the same.

"Just see how much you need to be able to see an object. You need eyes, light, and also the mind – all these are needed. If one of these three is missing, you can't see an object. As long as the mind is working, how can you say there is no world, that there is no 'I'?

"When the mind is destroyed, when there is no intention and conceptualization[1] one attains samadhi, one gains the knowledge of Brahman. But in do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti – the seven notes of the scale – one cannot remain for long at ti, the highest musical note."

Advice to the younger Naren – conversation with God after attaining His vision

Glancing at the younger Naren, Thakur says, "What use is it to only know that God exists? You have not reached the end when you have seen God. You have to bring Him to your house. You have to talk to Him.

"Some have heard of milk, some have seen it, and some have drunk it. Only a few have seen the king. Only one or two can bring him to their house and entertain him."

1. Sankalpa and vikalpa.

Thakur goes for a dip in the Ganges.

Chapter IV

His earlier story – Thakur has a vision of Shiva and the golden Annapurna in the holy pilgrim city of Kashi – sees the universe in the form of a shalagram

It is ten o'clock. Thakur is talking with the devotees when M. returns from bathing in the Ganges. He salutes Thakur, and then sits beside him.

Thakur, full of divine emotion, talks about many things. During the conversation, he discusses some of his most secret visions.

Sri Ramakrishna: "When I went to Kashi with Mathur Babu, our boat passed close to the Manikarnika Ghat. Suddenly I had a vision of Shiva. I went to the edge of the boat and stood there and went into samadhi. In fear that I would fall into the river, the boatman shouted to Hriday, 'Hold him, hold him.' I saw Shiva standing at that ghat in the most profound mood. At first I saw Him standing at a distance, then I saw Him approaching me. After that, He merged into me.

"In a state of ecstasy I saw a sannyasin leading me by the hand. We entered a temple, and I had a vision of the golden Annapurna.

"God Himself has become everything. He is more manifest in some forms, however.

(*To M. and others*) "Perhaps you don't recognize the spiritual meaning of a shalagram. Englishmen don't. It doesn't matter if you believe in it or not. A

shalagram with good signs – the mark of a disc in the shape of a cow's face, and some other signs."

M.: "Sir, like a man with good physical signs has a greater manifestation of God in him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "At first Narendra called them [Ramakrishna's visions] hallucinations of the mind. Now, he accepts everything."

While talking about visions of God, Thakur passes into bhava samadhi. The devotees watch him silently. After a long time, he regains consciousness and begins to talk.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "What did I see? That the universe is a shalagram. I saw your two eyes in it."

M. and the other devotees listen in amazement to this wonderful and unheard of vision. Just then another young devotee, Sarada, enters the room, salutes Thakur, and sits down.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Sarada*[1]): "Why don't you come to Dakshineswar? When I go to Calcutta, why don't you come to see me?"

Sarada: "I don't hear about your visits."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I'll let you know the next time. (*Laughing, to M.*) Make a list of these boys." (*M. and other devotees laugh.*)

1. Later Swami Trigunatitananda.

News of Purna – Thakur is very happy to see Narendra

Sarada: "My family wants me to marry. He (M.) has reprimanded us so many times about marriage."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why marry now? (*To M.*) Sarada is now in a very good state of mind. He used to seem hesitant, like a fish pulling the float of a fishing line. Now his face looks happy."

Thakur says to a devotee, "Will you please fetch Purna?"

Narendra enters. Thakur asks that refreshments be served him. He is very happy to see Narendra. He seemed to feel that he was serving the Lord Himself by feeding Narendra. Thakur is stroking his body affectionately, gently massaging his hands and feet. Gopal's Mother (the brahmin woman of Kamarhati) enters the room. Thakur had asked Balaram to send a man to Kamarhati to bring her. That is why she has come. As she enters the room, she says, "I am shedding tears of joy." Then she prostrates before Thakur in salutation.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What are you doing? You call me Gopala and then you salute me.

"Please go inside and cook a dish. Put a lot of ghee and spices in it so we can smell it from here." (*All laugh.*)

Gopal's Mother: "What will these people [the members of the family] say?"

Is Gopal's Mother thinking to herself that she was a newcomer and the family members could take offense?

Before going in, she says to Narendra in a touching tone of voice, "Child, have I achieved or does something remain to achieve?"

It is the Car Festival day. The offering of food and worship of Lord Jagannath had been somewhat delayed. Now, after the worship, Thakur is to be served. He goes to the inner apartments, where the women devotees are eagerly awaiting him – to see him and pay their obeisance.

Thakur had many women devotees, but he did not talk much about them to the men devotees. If someone went to visit women devotees, he would say, "Don't go to her very often. You may have a fall." Sometimes he would say, "Even if a woman rolls on the ground with love for God, you shouldn't visit her frequently." Let men and women devotees live separately. This will be good for both of them. And he would say further, "It isn't good for women devotees to practice motherly feelings[1] for men. Such an attitude could change and bring about a downfall."

Chapter V

Car Festival at Balaram's house – in the joy of devotional songs, with Narendra and other devotees

It is one o'clock. After the midday meal, Thakur comes in and sits with the devotees in the drawing room. One of them has brought Purna. Thakur says to M. joyfully, "Here he is! Purna has arrived!"

1. The attitude of Gopala toward them.

Narendra, the younger Naren, Narayan, Haripada, and others sit near Thakur and talk with him.

Free will and the younger Naren – Narendra sings

The younger Naren: "Sir, do we have free will?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Just try to find your 'I.' When you are searching for 'I,' you find Him. 'I am the instrument, You are the operator.' You know, a puppet goes into a shop with a letter in its hand. God alone is the doer.[1] Work as though you are a doer, but know that you are not.

"As long as there is any adjunct, or a limiting quality[2] to your identity, you are in ignorance. To think that you are learned, or a jnani, or wealthy, or respectable, or father, or guru – all these come from ignorance. 'I am the instrument and You are the operator,' is knowledge. Then all marks of identity are obliterated. When firewood has been fully burnt, it produces no sound. It gives no heat. Then it is all cool. Peace, peace, peace.'

(*To Narendra*) "Please sing a little."

Narendra: "I have to go home. I have lot of work to do."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, child. Why should you listen to us? One listens carefully to those who have gold in their ears. Who listens to one who only has a torn cloth? (*All laugh.*)

"You can go to the garden house of the Guhas. When I ask where you are, I often hear that you are

1. God is the puppeteer.
2. Upadhi.

at the garden house of the Guhas. I wouldn't have mentioned this, but you forced it out of me."

Narendra is silent for a few minutes. Then he says, "There are no instruments. Shall I just sing?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "My child, this is the situation here. Sing if you'd like to. This is how Balaram has arranged it.

"Balaram says, 'Please come in a boat. But if that's not possible, you may hire a carriage.' (*All laugh.*) He has given us a feast, so he will make us dance in the afternoon. (*Laughter.*) One day he hired a carriage for me for twelve annas. I asked, 'Will he take me to Dakshineswar for twelve annas?' He said, 'That's enough.' On the way one side of the carriage fell apart and dropped off. (*All laugh.*) And the horse would suddenly stop just anywhere and it wasn't possible to make it move. A number of times the coachman whipped it and it ran a little. (*Loud laughter.*) So now this evening Ram will play the drum and we will dance. But Ram has no sense of rhythm! (*All laugh.*) Balaram's attitude is: sing, dance, and make yourself happy." (*All laugh.*)

Other devotees are gradually coming back from their homes, having eaten and rested.

Seeing Mahendra Mukherji saluting him from a distance, Thakur bows to him and also offers him a salaam.[1] He says to a young devotee sitting near him, "Tell him that I salaamed. He harps on Olcott,

1. A low bow with the right palm to the forehead.

Olcott[1] all the time." Many of the householder devotees have brought their wives and other women relatives with them. They wanted to have the darshan of Thakur and watch the kirtan singing in front of the chariot. Ram, Girish, and other devotees arrive one by one. A number of youngster devotees have also come.

Now Narendra sings:

When will dawn that day when tears stream from my eyes as I repeat Lord Hari's name?[2]

He sings again:

In dense darkness, O Mother, Your formless beauty sparkles. And so the yogi meditates in a dark mountain cave.

In the lap of infinite darkness, on the waves of the great silence,[3] eternal peace and joy float without end.

Putting on the form of the Formless One, in darkness draped, O Mother, who are You seated alone in boundless bliss?

At the lotus of Your fear-dispelling feet flashes the lightning of love, while loud and earth-shaking laughter issues from Your dazzling face.

Balaram has arranged for a kirtan by Vaishnavcharan and Banwari. Now Vaishnavcharan sings.

O my tongue, always repeat the name of Durga.

Who else can save you from danger but She?[4]

After listening to the song for some time, Thakur passes into samadhi. He is standing, held

1. Col. Henry Steel Olcott, first president of the Theosophical Society.
2. For the complete song refer to Section XIII, Chapter III.
3. Nirvana.
4. For the complete song refer to Section XV, Chapter IV.

by the younger Naren. His face is lit with a smile. Gradually he becomes absolutely still. The roomful of devotees watches him silently, while the women observe him from behind a bamboo screen. It is as if Lord Narayana Himself has come down in human form for the devotees – come down to teach them how to love God.

After a long time chanting God's name, his samadhi ends. When he sits down, Vaishnavcharan again begins to sing:

O my vina, sing Hari, Hari![1]

And then:

O my vina, the day passes in vain without worshiping Lord Hari.

Banwari, another singer, sings of God's form and beauty. During the song, he repeats, "Ah! Ah!" and prostrates. Some listeners laugh, others feel irritated.

It is afternoon. In the meantime, the small car of Sri Jagannath, decorated with flags and bunting, has been brought to the verandah. Lord Jagannath, Subhadra, and Balaram have been adorned with sandal paste and decorated with jewelry and garlands of flowers. Leaving Banwari's kirtan, Thakur comes to the front of the car on the verandah. Devotees accompany him. Holding the rope, he pulls the car a little and then sings and dances ahead of it with the devotees. Improvising, he sings:

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1. For the complete song refer to Section XVII, Chapter I.

Behold, the brothers have come! The two who shed tears while chanting Hari's name,[1]

They, who receiving the world's blows, offer Hari's love.

The song concludes:

Behold, the whole of Nadia trembles under the waves of Gauranga's love!

There is singing and dancing on the verandah as the car is drawn. Hearing the loud music of the kirtan and the sound of the drums, a number of neighbors come to the verandah. Thakur is intoxicated with the name of the Lord. The devotees dance with him in an ecstasy of love.

Chapter VI

Narendra's song – Thakur's ecstatic dance

After the kirtan and dancing before the car, Sri Ramakrishna returns to the room and sits down. Mani and other devotees stroke his feet.

Full of divine feeling, Narendra sings again accompanied by a tanpura:

Come, come, O Mother, my heart's delight and doll of my soul;

So that I can constantly see You, come sit in the lotus of my heart.

Again he sings:

Mother! You are Tara,[2] though You have assumed the three gunas, You are even beyond the Limitless.

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1. For the complete song refer to Section VI, Chapter I.
2. The savior, literally "she who takes one across [the ocean of worldly existence]".

I know You are merciful to the lowly, the one who frees from all distress.

You are sandhya, You are Gayatri, You are the support of the Universe, O Mother!

You are the redeemer of yearning souls, always stealing the heart of Shiva.

In all bodies You dwell, in all worshipful beings, in that with form and without.

He sings another song:

I have made You the pole-star of my life.

Never shall I lose my way on this sea of the world.

A devotee asks Narendra if he will sing the song "O Mother, ruler of the heart! You are awake within…."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Away with you! Are you going to sing such songs now? Sing a song of joy – 'Shyama, the river of nectar.'"

Narendra sings:

Who can fathom Your various moods?

O Mother Shyama, You are the river of nectar.

Mother! Cupid flees before. Your playful glance…

Narendra becomes intoxicated with ecstasy and sings again and again:

O Brahman Absolute, the Eternal One, my Mother!

Do dance sometimes on the lotus of the heart of Kamala also.

Thakur dances, intoxicated with ecstatic love, singing, "O Brahman Absolute, the Eternal One, my Mother." After dancing for a long time, he returns to his seat. He is very happy to see

Narendra singing with such absorption in ecstasy, with tears in his eyes.

It must be around 9 p.m. Thakur is still sitting with the devotees.

He listens again to Vaishnavcharan's songs:

Like Krishna's, the complexion of the handsome Sri Gauranga, the dancing lover of God, is of golden hue.[1]

And:

O Hari, how shall I know You now?

O Bankura, living in Mathura, clad in royal splendour and riding elephants,

Have you forgotten the grazing of cows? Have you forgotten us?

Do you remember how you stole butter in Vraja?

It is now 10 or 11 p.m. The devotees are saluting Thakur in preparation to leave.

Sri Ramakrishna: "All right, you can go home now. (*Pointing to Narendra and the younger Naren*) It would be good if they both stay. (*To Girish*) Are you going to have your dinner at home? Wait awhile. What about a smoke? Oh, Balaram's servant is just like that. Ask for a smoke and he won't prepare it. (*Everybody laughs.*) But don't leave without having a smoke."

A friend wearing glasses had come with Girish. He has left after seeing and hearing everything. Thakur says to Girish, "I tell you, and also Haripal, don't force anybody to come here. Nothing happens before its time."

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1. For the complete song refer to Section VIII, Chapter I.

A devotee salutes Thakur. A little boy is with him. Thakur says affectionately, "You may now go. And this child with you." Narendra, the younger Naren, and one or two devotees will go home a little later.

Chapter VII

Sri Ramakrishna at early dawn – sweet dancing and chanting of God's name

Sri Ramakrishna is lying on the bed in the small room to the west of the drawing room. It is 4 a.m. To the south of the room is a verandah where M. is sitting on a stool.

After a while Thakur comes out on the verandah. M. salutes him by prostrating. It is Wednesday, 15 July 1885, the 32nd day of Ashada, Sankranti.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I got up once before. Well, should I return in the morning?"

M.: "Yes, sir. The water is less choppy in the morning."

It is morning. The devotees have not yet assembled. After washing, Thakur sweetly chants the divine name. M. is near him. After some time, Gopal's Mother comes in and stands close to him. One or two other lady devotees are watching from the door of the inner apartments. It is as if the gopis of Vrindavan are watching Sri Krishna. Or the women devotees of Navadvip, intoxicated with ecstatic love, are looking at Sri Gauranga from behind a screen.

After chanting Rama's name, Thakur chants the name of Krishna: "Krishna! Krishna! Gopi Krishna! Gopi! Gopi! Krishna, the life breath of the cowherd boys. Krishna, the boy of Nanda! Govinda! Govinda!"

Now he chants the name of Gauranga:

"Sri Krishna Chaitanya Prabhu Nityananda! Hare Krishna! Hare Rama! Radha Govinda!"

Then he repeats: "The Imperceptible Pure One."[1] Saying this, he weeps. Watching him weep and hearing his touching voice, the devotees standing close also begin to cry. He weeps and says, "O, the Pure One! O my dear, come and eat. When shall I make my life blessed by feeding You? You have come, assuming a body, for my sake."

He is expressing his pain before Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe, the friend of the lowly, the friend of the world. "I am not separate from the world; my Master, be merciful to me."

Becoming intoxicated with ecstatic love, he sings:

Live joyfully chanting the name of Jagannath of Orissa.

Now he dances, singing the name of Narayana: "The Lord Narayana! The Lord Narayana! Narayana! Narayana!"

Dancing, he sings again:

O gopi friend! I have not yet found Him whose love has driven me mad.

Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva – all three are mad.

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1. Alekh Niranjan.

These three mad gods have conspired to break Navadvip.

And in the fields of Vrindavan I have seen another who is mad.

He has clad Radha in royal robes and assumed for Himself the role of a guard.

Now Thakur sits in the small room with the devotees. He is naked, like a five-year-old child. M., Balaram and one or two other devotees are sitting with him.

When does one see God's form? – secrets – seeing Narayana in pure youngsters – Ramlal, Niranjan, Purna, Narendra, Tarak of Belgharia, and the younger Naren

Sri Ramakrishna: "You can see the form of God. You can have this vision when you get rid of all adjuncts of your own identity and reasoning stops. Then a person goes into speechless samadhi. How much people talk in the theatre – of this thing and that. But as soon as the curtain rises, all discussion stops. Then a person is fully absorbed in what he sees.

"I tell you a very secret thing. Why do I love boys like Purna and Narendra so much? When I went to embrace Jagannath in a loving mood, I broke my arm. He made me understand: 'You have taken up a human body. Now live with human beings as a friend, a parent, and such other relationships.'

"When I see Purna, I now experience the same feeling that I used to have with Ramlala. I used to bathe Ramlala and feed him and put him to bed. Wherever I went, I took him with me. I would sit

and weep for Ramlala. I have the same feeling when I see these young boys. Look at Niranjan. He's not attached to anything. He takes poor people to the doctor, spending his own money. At the mention of marriage, he says, 'My God! That is a whirlpool of the Vishalakshi!'[1] I see him sitting on a light.

"Purna belongs to a high spiritual ideal of God with form – he has an element of Vishnu! Ah, what love he has!

(*To M.*) "Did you notice how he looked at you? Just like one looks upon a brother disciple, as if you were his very own. He said he'd come see me again. He said he'd meet me at Captain's house."

Many qualities of Narendra – the qualities of the younger Naren

"Narendra is of a very high spiritual ideal – the realm of the Absolute. He has a masculine nature.

"So many devotees come here but none of them is like him.

"Sometimes I sit down and calculate their natures. I see them like lotuses. Some of them have ten petals, some have sixteen, some a hundred. But Narendra is a thousand-petalled lotus.

"Others may be small tumblers or pitchers, but Narendra is a huge barrel.

"Among ponds and tanks, he is a large lake, like the Haldarpukur.

1. A stream near Kamarpukur.

"Among fish, Narendra is a red-eyed carp, others are small fish, like minnows or small white fish.

"He is a big receptacle. Many things can be kept in him. He is like a bamboo with a big hollow space inside.

"Narendra is not the slave of anything. He is not subject to any attachment or sense pleasure. Like a male pigeon. If you hold its beak, it pulls away from you. A female pigeon just stays still.

"Tarak of Belgharia can be called a red-eyed carp**.**

"Narendra is manly. That's why he sits on the right side in a carriage. Bhavanath has a feminine nature, so I tell him to sit on the other side.

"When Narendra is in a gathering, I feel strong."

Mahendra Mukherji enters and salutes. It is about eight o'clock in the morning. Haripada and Tulsiram arrive, one after the other. They salute Sri Ramakrishna and sit down. Baburam is suffering from fever and couldn't come.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and others*): "Hasn't the younger Naren come? Maybe he's under the impression I've already left. (*To Mukherji*) What a wonder! As a child, that boy (the younger Naren) would cry for the Lord when he returned from school. Is it a small thing to cry for God? And he is so intelligent. He is a bamboo with a big hollow compared to other bamboos.

"And he has given his entire mind to me. Girish Ghosh told me that the day kirtan was held at

Navagopal's house, the younger Naren was there. Asking where I was, he was not conscious of his surroundings. He began to walk over people looking for me.

"And he's not afraid that he'll be criticized at home. He stays at Dakshineswar for three nights at a time."

Chapter VIII

Deep secret of bhakti yoga – harmony of jnana and bhakti

Mukherji, Hari Babu, Purna, Niranjan, M., and Balaram

[Priyanath] Mukherji: "Hari (Hari Babu of Baghbazar)[1] was amazed at what you said yesterday. He said, 'All this is in the Samkhya philosophy, in Patanjali, and the Vedanta. He is not an ordinary person.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "But I have not read the Samkhya or the Vedanta.

"Perfect jnana and perfect bhakti are one and the same. By discriminating 'not this, not this,' all reasoning ends, leading to the knowledge of Brahman. Then one accepts again what one has renounced. You have to be careful climbing to the roof. But when you get there, you see that the roof is made of the same materials – brick, lime, and brick dust – of which the steps are made.

1 Later Swami Turiyananda.

"He who is aware of high is also aware of low. After attaining spiritual knowledge, high and low appear as one.

"When Prahlada realized the Ultimate Reality, he felt, 'I am He.'[1] And when consciousness of the body returned, his attitude would change to 'I am Your servant.'[2]

"Hanuman also sometimes felt the attitude of 'I am He,' sometimes 'I am Your servant,' and at other times, 'I am a part of You.'

"Why should one cherish love for God? Without it, how can a man spend his days?

"This I-ness does not go away. As long as there is the pot of I-ness, the attitude of 'I am He' is not attained. In samadhi, however, that I-ness disappears. Then what exists is only He. Ramprasad says, 'Mother, only You will know in that state whether I am good or You are good.'

"As long as I-ness persists, it is better to have the attitude of a devotee. It's not right to think 'I am God' or 'O embodied being, you are not like Krishna, you are just a devotee.' But it's a different matter if God Himself draws you. It's like a master saying affectionately to his servant, 'Come, come along. Sit beside me. You are the same as I.'

"The waves belong to the Ganges, not the Ganges to the waves.

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1. So 'ham.
2. Daso 'ham.

"Shiva has both states of mind. When he is absorbed in the joy of the Self,[1] he is in the state of 'I am He' – he is fully fixed in union with God. But when he feels himself a separate 'I-ness,' he dances, exclaiming, 'Rama! Rama!'

"That to which the movable belongs, to Him also belongs the immovable.

"That is why you may not be moving just now, but after a while you begin to work.

"Spiritual knowledge and love for God are one and the same. Even so, one person says that it is water and another that it is a piece of ice."

Two kinds of samadhi – obstacle to samadhi: 'lust and greed'

"Broadly speaking, samadhi is of two kinds. By reasoning on the path of jnana, I-ness is obliterated and one attains samadhi. It is called sthira samadhi or jada samadhi (nirvikalpa samadhi). The samadhi attained by the path of bhakti is known as bhava samadhi. In this samadhi, a thin line of I-ness persists to enable one to enjoy divine bliss, divine contact. However, if a person is attached to 'lust and greed,' this state cannot be attained.

"I said to Kedar, 'If your mind dwells in "lust and greed," you can't realize God.' Once I thought I might stroke his chest with my hand, but I couldn't do it. Within him, there was something twisted. It was like a house smelling filthy – I couldn't enter it. It was like a natural Shiva Lingam, whose roots spread as far as Kashi. As long as you are attracted

1. Atmarama.

by the world, as long you are attached to 'lust and greed,' you cannot succeed.

"'Lust and greed' has not yet entered into these youngsters. That's why I am so fond of them. Hazra says, 'You like a boy who is handsome and the son of a rich man.' If that were true, why would I be so fond of Harish, Latu, Narendra? Narendra can't find a pice for salt to season his rice.

"Worldliness has not yet entered into these youngsters' minds. That's why they are so pure.

"And many of them are ever-perfect ones.[1] They were drawn to God since their birth. Imagine you've bought a garden and when clearing it, you discover a previously installed water pipe. You open it and lo, water gushes out!"

Purna and Niranjan – serving the mother – the attitude of a Vaishnava

Balaram: "Sir, how is it that Purna has realized suddenly that the world is an illusion?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "From past lives.[2] He's done everything in previous births. Only the body is small or grows old, not the Atman.

"Do you know how it is with these youngsters? Bearing fruit even before flowering. First they see God, and then they hear about His glories and attributes. After that comes direct union.

"Look at Niranjan. He's not a bookkeeper – he doesn't keep track of gain and loss. When he hears

1. Nityasiddhas.
2. Janamantrin.

the call, he can go. But as long as a person's mother is alive, she has to be looked after. I used to worship my mother with flowers and sandal paste. It is the Mother of the Universe who has come down in the form of your mother. The memorial service honouring a deceased relative is the worship of one's chosen deity. Vaishnavas celebrate in a grand way when somebody dies. Their festival has the same significance.

"As long as you take care of your own body, you must look after your mother. So I say to Hazra, 'When you have a cough, you make a mixture of sugar candy and pepper, and you have to get the pepper and also salt for taste.' As long as you do this for yourself, you have also to take care of your mother.

"A minor can't take responsibility for himself, so he has a guardian. Chaitanya Deva's state was like that of a minor."

M. goes to take dip in the Ganges.

Chapter IX

Sri Ramakrishna's horoscope – his earlier story – Thakur's realization of God

Vision of Rama, Lakshmana, and Krishna[1] – naked figure of a paramahamsa

Sri Ramakrishna is talking with the devotees in the same small room in Balaram's house. Mahendra Mukherji, Balaram, Tulsi, Haripada, Girish, and other devotees are sitting on the floor.

1. Parthasarthi.

Girish has been visiting Thakur for seven or eight months. M. has returned after his bath in the Ganges. He salutes Thakur and sits beside him. Thakur is relating a few of his wonderful visions of God.

"One day in the Kali Temple I saw Nangta[1] and Haladhari reading the Adhyatma Ramayana. Suddenly I saw a stream with woods and green trees and plants on either side. I saw Rama and Lakshmana walking along wearing shorts.[2] One day, in front of the kuthi, I saw Arjuna's chariot, with the Lord sitting in it as the charioteer. I remember this even now.

"Another day, during a kirtan at my native village, I saw the figure of Gauranga before me.

"A naked man used to be with me all the time then. I would touch his penis and cut jokes with him. Then I would laugh and laugh. This naked form came out of my own body – the picture of a paramahamsa – like a child.

"Oh, I can't describe the many divine visions I had. At the time I had severe stomach troubles. The visions would aggravate them, so when I had one, I would say, 'Get away!' But they would catch hold of me, like ghosts. I would remain absorbed in ecstasy. I couldn't tell you how I passed my days. Then all divine emotion would pass as if I had had a bout of diarrhea." (*Laughter.*)

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1. Totapuri.
2. Jandhiya.

Girish (*smiling*): "I am examining your horoscope."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I was born on the second lunar day. Except for the positions of sun, moon, and mercury,[1] it doesn't show much more."

Girish: "You were born under Aquarius. Rama and Krishna were born under Cancer and Taurus. And Chaitanya Deva under Leo."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I had two desires. One, to be king of the devotees. Two, that I should not be a dry sadhu."

Sri Ramakrishna's horoscope – why spiritual practice for Thakur? – vision of Brahmayoni

Girish (*smiling*): "Why did you have to practice spiritual disciplines?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "The Divine Mother[2] underwent many difficult spiritual practices for Shiva,[3] sitting encircled by five fires,[4] keeping her body immersed in water during cold weather, and gazing at the sun without blinking.

"Krishna practiced a number of spiritual disciplines with the Radha Yantra. That yantra was the Brahmayoni from which universes arise. He would meditate on it and worship it. From it thousands of universes are created.

"This is very secret. Under the bel tree I used to have sparkling visions."

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1. Ravi, Chandra, and Buddha.
2. Bhagavati.
3. To win him as a husband.
4. Panchatapa.

His earlier story – practicing Tantra under the bel tree – Brahmani procured the articles

"I practiced a number of Tantric disciplines under the bel tree – with a skull, and so forth. And I performed a number of postures. The Brahmani arranged everything.

(*Moving nearer to Haripada*) "In that state I used to worship the penis of young boys with flowers and sandalwood paste. I couldn't help myself.

"And there was another experience. I would fall sick the very next day if I became egoistic."

M. sits like a picture without saying a word when he hears Thakur tell of his wonderful experiences, words never heard before. The devotees also sit there as if bathed in the redeeming current of the Ganges, as if the Bhagavata itself were flowing from the lips of Sri Ramakrishna.

Everyone is silent.

Tulasi:[1] "He (M.) never laughs."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He has laughter within. There is sand over the course of the Phalgu River. But dig into it and you will reach water.

(*To M.*) "Don't you scrape your tongue? Please clean your tongue every day."

Balaram: "Well, Purna has come to know many things about you from him (M.)."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He knows my earlier life story. But what, I don't know."

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1. The future Swami Nirmalananda.

Balaram: "Purna is perfect by nature. What are these people?"[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "They are just instruments."

It is nine o'clock. Arrangements have been made for Thakur's return to Dakshineswar. A boat has been hired and is ready for him at the Annapurna ghat of Baghbazar. Prostrating, the devotees salute Thakur.

He boards the boat with one or two devotees. Gopal's Mother goes into the same boat. After a little rest at Dakshineswar, she will continue on foot to Kamarhatti in the evening.

Thakur's camp cot from Dakshineswar, which had been sent for repairs, is also loaded into the boat. It was on this cot that Rakhal generally slept.

This is, however, not an auspicious day for departure.[2] To change his itinerary date, Thakur has decided to return to Balaram's house this coming Saturday.

1. M. and the others.
2. Magha Nakshatra.

Section XXIV

Thakur at the Dakshineswar Temple with Rakhal, M., Mahimacharan, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Dwija, Dwija's father, and Sri Ramakrishna – debt owed to one's mother and father

Sri Ramakrishna is in his room at the Dakshineswar temple with Rakhal, M., and other devotees. It is about three or four o'clock.

It is the beginning stage of Sri Ramakrishna's sore throat, yet he thinks the whole day only of the good of the devotees – how they might not get bound to the world, how they can gain knowledge and love of God, and how they may realize God.

Ten or twelve days ago, on Tuesday, 28 July 1885, he visited the home of Nandalal Bose at Calcutta to see the pictures of gods. He then graciously visited the homes of Balaram and other devotees.

Having returned from Vrindavan, Rakhal has stayed at home for some days. At present he, Latu, Harish, and Ramlal are staying with Thakur.

A few months ago, the Holy Mother came from the countryside to nurse Thakur at Dakshineswar. She is staying in the nahabat. The grief-stricken Brahmani has been living with her for some days.

Dwija, Dwija's father and brother, M., and others are sitting beside Thakur. Today is 9 August, 1885.

Dwija is about sixteen years old. After the death of his mother, his father married a second time. Dwija often comes to see Thakur with M., though this displeases his father.

Some time ago Dwija's father spoke about coming to visit Thakur. Today he has come. He is the manager of a Calcutta business. He was a student of D.L. Richardson at the Hindu College and has passed examinations for lawyer of the High Court.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Dwija's father*): "Please don't worry about your son's visits here.

"I tell you, go live a householder's life after attaining spiritual awakening. If someone finds gold after hard labour, he can keep it underground or in a box or in water. It doesn't affect the gold.

"I tell you, live a householder's life without attachment. Break a jackfruit after rubbing your hands with oil. Then its juice won't stick to your hand.

"If an immature mind is put in worldly life, it gets dirty. You should only live a householder's life after you've attained spiritual knowledge.

"If you put milk in water, it gets ruined. But if you first churn butter out of the milk and then put it in water, you can keep the butter in water."

Dwija's Father: "True, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "I understand why you scold him. You only threaten. The brahmachari said to the snake, 'You are a real fool. I only asked you not to bite. I never asked you not to hiss. If you'd hissed, your enemies wouldn't have been able

to beat you.' When you rebuke the boy, it's only hissing."

Dwija's father laughs.

"If a father has a good son, it's a mark of his father's spiritual nature. If water in a pond is clean, it's a sign of the virtue of its owner.

"A son is said to be born of one's self (atmaja). There is no difference between you and your son. You have become your son in another way. On the one hand, you're a worldly man working in an office and enjoying family life. On the other hand, you're a devotee of God in the form of your son. I heard that you were a very worldly person. But it's not true. (*Smiling*) You know all this. But you are very tactful. You are saying yes, yes even to this."

Dwija's father smiles a little.

"If your boys come here, they know what you really are. How great is one's father! A person who practices religion by deceiving his parents will get nowhere."

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna's worry about his mother in Vrindavan

"A man owes many debts. Debt to the father, debt to the gods, and debt to the rishis. And there is debt to the mother too. Furthermore, there is debt to the wife. She has to be taken care of. If she's a faithful wife, a person even has to arrange for her maintenance after death.

"I couldn't stay in Vrindavan because of my mother. As soon as I remembered that she was at

the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, I couldn't keep my mind in Vrindavan.

"I tell them to live in the family and also keep their minds on God. I don't ask them to renounce the world. Do this and do that too."

Dwija's Father: "I tell the boys to study. I don't tell them not to visit you. But I don't want them to waste time frivolously with the other boys."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He (Dwija) surely has good tendencies from past births. Why aren't his two brothers the same? Why is only he inclined this way?

"Can you forcibly stop him? A person acts according to tendencies of past births."

The father: "Yes, that is certainly true."

Thakur comes down and sits on the mat close to Dwjia's father. He touches him now and then while he talks.

It is almost twilight. Thakur says to M. and the others, "Please take him for darshan of the deities. If I were well, I would go with him."

He asks for sandesh for the boys. He says to Dwija's father, "Let them eat a little. They should have some sweets."

Dwija's father strolls in the garden after visiting the deities in the temples. Sri Ramakrishna is talking happily with Bhupen, Dwija, M., and others on the southeastern verandah of his room. He slaps the backs of Bhupen and M. in fun and says to Dwija with a smile, "How I talked to your father!"

After twilight Dwija's father comes again to Thakur's room. He is going to leave soon. He is feeling the heat. Thakur himself fans him.

As Dwija's father leaves, Thakur stands up.

Chapter II

Thakur talks freely – what is Sri Ramakrishna, a perfect man or an incarnation of God?

It is 8 p.m. Thakur is talking with Mahimacharan while Rakhal, M., and a few of Mahimacharan's companions are also in the room.

Mahimacharan is going to spend the night here.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, how do you find Kedar? Has he 'drunk milk' or only 'seen it?'

Mahima: "Yes, he is enjoying bliss."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And Nityagopal?"

Mahima: "Good. He's in a very nice state."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Alright. So tell me, has Girish Ghosh changed?"

Mahima: "Very nicely – but he belongs to a separate class."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Narendra?"

Mahima: "He is what I was fifteen years ago."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And the younger Naren? Isn't he guileless?"

Mahima: "Yes. He is very simple-hearted."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's true. (*Thinking some more*) Who else?

"It's enough if all the youngsters who come here know just two things. When they do, they won't have to practice much spiritual discipline. First, who I am – and then who they are. Many of these youngsters belong to the inner circle.

"Those who belong to the inner circle won't attain liberation. I will take up a body again (in the northwest).

"I feel great peace when I see these youngsters. How can I feel happy when I see those who father sons, engage in law-suits, and are busy with 'lust and greed?' How can I live without seeing pure souls?"

Mahimacharan chants verses from the scriptures for Thakur and talks of different yogic postures[1] such as bhuchari, khechari, sambhavi, and so forth, mentioned in the Tantra.

Thakur experiences five kinds of samadhi – piercing the six spiritual centres – basic truth of yoga – kundalini

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, some people say that in samadhi the atman flies around like a bird in the Great Space.[2]

"Once a sadhu came here from Hrishikesh. He said, 'Samadhi is of five kinds. And you experience them all. I have seen this. Like an ant, a fish, a monkey, a bird, and a serpent.'

"At times, the spiritual current rises up like an ant's movement. Sometimes, in the state of

1. Mudras.
2. Mahakasha.

samadhi, the atman swims joyfully in an ocean of ecstasy, like a fish.

"Sometimes, when I'm lying on my side, the great spiritual current pushes me, like a monkey playing with me. I stay quiet. Then this great current suddenly jumps around like a monkey and climbs up to the thousand-petalled centre. That's why I jump up with a start.

"And sometimes, the great current rises up like a bird, hopping from one branch to another. The place where it rests feels like fire. Perhaps it rises from muladhara to the svadhisthana, from the svadhishtana to the heart, and in this way rises right up to the head.

"Sometimes, the spiritual current rises like the zigzag movement of a snake. When it rises to the head, I experience samadhi."

His earlier story – first ecstasy at the age of 22 or 23, in 1858 – piercing the six spiritual centres

"Spiritual consciousness is not awakened until the kundalini has awakened.

"The kundalini lies in the muladhara. When it is awakened, it passes though the centre of the sushumna spiritual nerve, to pierce the svadhisthana, manipura, and the other spiritual centres, until it finally reaches the head. This is known as the movement of the great spiritual current. Thus finally one enters samadhi.

"You can't gain spiritual awareness by just reading books. You have to call upon Him. The kundalini wakes up when you yearn for God.

Listening and reading about spiritual knowledge in books – of what use is that?

"Just before I reached this state, I was shown how the power of the kundalini is awakened. How all the lotuses of the spiritual centres begin to open out one by one – and finally I was in samadhi. This is very secret. I saw that a young man about twenty-two or twenty-three years old, just like me, entered my sushumna nerve and began to play intimately with the lotuses, touching them with his tongue. First at the rectum, then at the organ of reproduction, and then the navel. These lotuses with four petals, six petals, and ten petals, all looking downward, began to look up.

"When it reached the heart, I still remember it very clearly. The twelve-petalled lotus, which looked downward, turned upward and opened out when he touched it with his tongue. Then the sixteen-petalled lotus in the throat and then the two-petalled lotus in the forehead opened up. Last of all, the thousand-petalled lotus, the sahasrara, opened out. Since then I have been in this state."

Chapter III

His earlier story – Thakur talks openly – is he a perfect human being or an incarnation of God?

(Talks with God – view of maya – sees devotees before their actual coming – sees Keshab Sen in ecstasy – vision of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute – and Narendra – and Kedar – illumined body in his first ecstasy – his father's dream – the Naked One and samadhi in three days – Mathur's service from 1858 to 1871, fourteen years – yearns for devotees on the roof of the kuthi – in continuous samadhi – practices all spiritual disciplines)

While he is talking of these things, Thakur comes down from his cot and sits close to Mahimacharan on the floor. M. and one or two other devotees are there. Rakhal is also present.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahima*): "I have been wanting to tell you this for many days, but I couldn't. I feel like telling you today.

"You say that my state can be attained just by practicing spiritual disciplines. This is not true. There is something special here."

M., Rakhal, and the other devotees listen eagerly and in amazement to what Thakur has to say.

Sri Ramakrishna: "God talked to me. It's not only that you can see God – you can talk with Him. Under the banyan tree, I saw Him coming up from the Ganges. O, how much we laughed after that! He twisted my fingers playfully. And then He talked. He actually talked to me.

"I wept for three days, and He showed me what the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, and other holy books contain. He showed it all to me.

"One day He also revealed to me what the maya of Mahamaya is. A small light in the room gradually became bigger and bigger until it spread out over the whole world and enveloped it.

"And then He showed me a big lake totally covered with sedge. When a breeze parted it a little, I saw water. But in no time at all, the sedge came dancing from all sides and again covered it completely. I was shown that the water was Sat-chit-ananda and the sedge was maya. Because of maya, you can't see Sat-chit-ananda. But sometimes, though you can get a momentary glimpse, maya again covers it up.

"I am shown what kind of devotees will come before they arrive. Under the banyan tree, I was shown the singing party of Chaitanya Deva stretching to the bakul tree. I saw Balaram in that party. If he had not been there, who would supply me with sugar candy and such things? And I saw him (M.) too."

Sri Ramakrishna – Keshab Sen introducing the name of Hari and the Divine Mother into his Samaj

"Before I met Keshab Sen, I saw him in a vision. While in the state of samadhi, I saw him and his group. There was a room full of people sitting in front of me. I saw Keshab – like a peacock with its tail spread out. The tail meant his group. And I saw a red jewel on Keshab's forehead. This is a sign of rajas. Keshab was saying to his devotees, 'Please

listen to everything he says.' I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, they hold the views of English people. Why should I talk to them?' The Divine Mother made me understand that this is how it is in the Kaliyuga. Then Keshab and his followers carried the names of Hari and the Divine Mother from here. That's why the Divine Mother took Vijay from Keshab's group. But he didn't join the Adi Brahmo Samaj.

(*Pointing to himself*) "There is something special within [me]. A boy named Gopal Sen used to visit me, quite a long time ago. He who is within me placed his foot on Gopal's chest. Gopal said in a state of ecstasy, 'You will have to wait a long time. I can't get along with worldly people. I have to leave now.' Saying this, he left. I heard later that he had quit his body after that. Maybe he has now been born as Nityagopal.

"I have had many wonderful visions. I had the vision of the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. I saw two groups divided by a fence in the middle. On one side, I saw Kedar, Chuni, and many other believers in God with form. On the other side of the fence was a shining heap of red brick dust – illumined. In the middle of it, I saw Narendra sitting in samadhi.

"Seeing him absorbed in meditation, I called out, 'Oh, Narendra.' He opened his eyes a little. I understood that he had been born in one form in Simla[1] as the son of a kayastha. I then said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, please bind him with Your

1. The section of Calcutta in which Narendra was born.

maya. Otherwise, he'll quit his body absorbed in samadhi.' Kedar, who was a believer in God with form, peeped in and ran away with a shudder.

"So I say to myself that the Divine Mother Herself resides in this [body] and plays with the devotees. When I first had this state, the body would shine with light and the chest would become red. Then I said, 'Mother, don't manifest Yourself externally. Go within, go within.' So now I have this dull body. If it were not so, people would trouble me a lot. They would gather in crowds if I still had that luminous body. There is no outer manifestation now. This drives away useless fellows. Only those who are pure devotees will stay. Why do I have this illness? It has the same meaning. Those who have devotion for some selfish reasons[1] will flee on seeing me ill.

"I had this desire. I said to the Divine Mother, 'May I become king of the devotees.'

"And then the thought came, 'Those who sincerely call upon God will have to come here. They will surely have to come.' Now see, this is exactly what is happening. Only those people are coming.

"My mother and my father knew what is here within. My father had a dream in Gaya in which Raghuvir said, 'I will be born as your son.'

"It is He who resides here within. As for such renunciation of 'lust and greed,' could I have

1. Sakama bhakti.

brought it about myself? I haven't cohabited with a woman even in dream!

"The Naked One taught me the Vedanta. I attained samadhi in three days. Seeing me in samadhi under the madhavi creeper, he was perplexed and exclaimed, 'Oh, what is this?' Later he realized what dwelt within this. Then he said to me, 'Please let me go.' Hearing these words I went into a state of ecstasy and said to him, 'You can't leave till I have realized the truth of Vedanta.'

"I was with him day and night. There was only Vedanta. Brahmani[1] would say, 'Son, don't listen to Vedanta. Your love for God will suffer.'

"I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, how will I be able to sustain this body? How can I live in the company of sadhus and devotees? Please send a rich man to me.' That's why Mathur Babu served me for fourteen years.

"He who dwells within tells me in advance what kind of devotees will come to me. As soon as I see the form of Gauranga before my eyes, I immediately know that the devotees of Gaur will be coming. And if a Shakta comes, I have the vision of Divine Energy, Kali, before my eyes.

"I used to shout from the roof of the kuthi at the time of the evening service, 'O all of you, where are you? Please come!' See, now they all are gathering one by one.

"God Himself dwells within this. As if He Himself is working with the devotees.

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1 Bhairavi Brahmani.

"How wonderful is the state of mind of some of the devotees! The younger Naren automatically experiences kumbhaka without effort. And then goes into samadhi time and again. Sometimes for two-and-half hours at a stretch! Sometimes longer. How wonderful!

"All kinds of disciplines have been practiced here: jnana yoga, bhakti yoga, and karma yoga. Even hatha yoga, to add years to the life. A person dwells within this. How else could I have love for God and live with devotees after samadhi? Koar Singh said, 'I have never seen a person returning [to life] after samadhi. You are none other than Nanak.'"

His earlier story – in the steamboat with Keshab, Pratap, and Mr. Cook – 1881

"There are worldly people everywhere – everywhere 'lust and greed.' And yet I live in this state surrounded by them, constantly experiencing samadhi or ecstasy. That's why Pratap (Pratap Chandra Majumdar of the Brahmo Samaj), when he came with Mr. Cook and noticed my samadhi in the steamer, said, 'Dear sir, you seem to be possessed by a ghost.'"

Rakhal, M. and the others listen wonderstruck to all these amazing words issuing from the mouth of Sri Ramakrishna.

Has Mahimacharan been able to understand what Thakur is hinting at? Even after hearing it all, he says, "Sir, all this has happened as ordained by your

destiny."[1] His feeling is that Thakur is just a holy man, a devotee. Consenting to his remark, Thakur says, "Yes, actions of my past lives are showing their effect now. It is like a gentleman possessing a number of houses. Here you have a special parlour. The devotee is His parlour."

Chapter IV

Mahimacharan's brahmachakra[2] – his earlier story – instructions by Totapuri

Is it a small thing to have a vision in dream? Narendra sees divine forms

It is nine o'clock at night. Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot. Mahimacharan wants to form a brahmachakra in the same room that Thakur is in. He forms a circle with Rakhal, M., Kishori, and one or two other devotees. Then he asks them all to meditate. Rakhal goes into ecstasy. Thakur comes down from the bed and, placing his hand on Rakhal's chest, begins to chant the name of the Divine Mother. Rakhal comes out of the ecstasy.

It must be one o'clock in the morning. It is the fourteenth lunar day of the dark fortnight, pitch dark everywhere. One or two devotees are pacing alone on the masonry embankment of the Ganges. Thakur gets up. He also comes out and says to the devotees, "The Naked One used to say that at such an hour, in the depth of night, one can hear the anahata sound."

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1. Prarabdha karma, that karma which has already been set in motion, the result of past actions being experienced in the present.
2. A mystic circle prescribed in Tantra.

In the later part of the night, Mahimacharan and M. lie down on the floor of Thakur's room. Rakhal is sleeping on the camp cot. Thakur at times paces the room stark-naked like a five-year-old boy.

It is morning. Thakur repeats the name of the Divine Mother. Going to the western verandah, he has a view of the Ganges. He then goes near all the pictures of the gods and goddesses in the room and salutes them. The devotees rise from their beds, salute him, and then attend to their morning ablutions.

Thakur talks to a devotee in the panchavati. The devotee had seen Chaitanya Deva in a dream.

Sri Ramakrishna (*in ecstasy*): "Ah! Ah!"

The devotee: "Sir, it was but a dream."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Is a dream a small matter?"

Thakur has tears in his eyes and his voice full of emotion.

Hearing that a devotee had a divine vision while awake, he says, "What is there to marvel at? Narendra also sees divine forms these days."

Finishing his morning ablutions, Mahimacharan goes to the Shiva temple west of the courtyard and alone chants verses from the Vedas.

It is eight o'clock in the morning. Mani comes to Thakur after a dip in the Ganges. The grief-stricken brahmin woman has also come to see Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the brahmin woman*): "Please give him some prasad to eat. There are some luchis and the like in the recess of the wall."

Brahmin woman: "You must eat first. Later, he will be served."

Sri Ramakrishna: "First eat the prasad[1] of Jagannath."

After having prasad, Mani goes to the Shiva temples. Then he returns to Thakur. Saluting him, he takes leave.

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately*): "You may go now. You have to attend to your work."

1 Atka.

Section XXV

Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal, M., Pundit Shyamapada, and Other Devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter I

In samadhi – showers his grace on Pundit Shyamapada

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room with one or two devotees. It is 5 p.m., Thursday, 27 August 1885; 12th of Bhadra, the second day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravana.

Thakur's illness is in the beginning stage. Even so, he doesn't think of his body when his devotees visit. Sometimes he talks with them the whole day, sometimes even singing.

Doctor Madhu has come by boat. The devotees are very worried about the illness. They would like the doctor to come daily to examine him. M. says to the Master, "He is very competent. It would be nice if he would see you every day."

Pundit Shyamapada Bhattacharya comes to see Thakur. His home is in the village of Antpur. It is now almost evening. Noticing it, the pundit says that he must go for his evening worship and he goes to the chandni on the bank of the Ganges, where he has an amazing vision while performing his worship. Afterward he returns to Thakur's room and sits on the floor. After repeating the name of

the Divine Mother and meditating on Her, Thakur sits on his bed. M. is sitting on the foot rug. Rakhal, Latu, and others come in and go out of the room.

Sri Ramakrishna (*pointing to the pundit while speaking to M.*): "He is a very nice person." (*To the pundit*) "God is where you find peace after discriminating by the process of 'Not this, not this.'"

Signs of God-realization and Pundit Shyamapada – Thakur in samadhi

"The king lives beyond the seven gates. When you go to the first gate, you see a rich man sitting with many people. There is a lot of splendour there. Wanting to see the king, if you ask your companion, 'Is this the king?' the companion smiles a little and says, 'No.' He says the same thing at the second gate and the other gates. You notice that the farther you go, the more splendour you see. There is greater and greater show of pomp. But when you pass the seventh gate, you no longer need to ask your companion. You stand there amazed, dumb-founded at the sight of the matchless riches of the king. Now you know that this indeed is the king. There is no doubt in your mind about it."

God, maya, living beings and the world – Adhyatma Ramayana – hymn by Yamalarjuna

Pundit: "Only when one leaves behind the kingdom of maya does one see Him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "After attaining God-realization, you see that God Himself has become maya, the world and its living beings. If you reason, 'Not this, not this,' you realize that this world is a

very deceptive place. It's like a dream. When you attain the realization of God, this world becomes a mart of joy.

"What's the use of only reading scriptures? Pundits only reason."

Pundit: "I hate it when someone calls me a pundit."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is His grace. Pundits spend their time reasoning. But some have heard of milk and others have tasted it. After you have realized God, you will see everything as Narayana. It is Narayana who has become all this."

The pundit chants a verse on Narayana. Thakur is full of joy.

sarvabhūtastham ātmānaṁ sarvabhūtāni cātmani ।

īkṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ ।।

[His mind being harmonized by yoga, he sees himself in all beings and all beings in himself; he sees the same in all.]

– Bhagavad Gita 6:29

Sri Ramakrishna: "Have you read the Adhyatma (Ramayana)?"

Pundit: "Yes, sir. I've read some of it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is full of spiritual knowledge and love for God. The Shavari story and Ahalya's hymn are all full of love for God.

"But this is a fact. God is far beyond worldliness."

Pundit: "God is very far[1] from worldly intelligence. And where it is not, He is near.[2] I saw a landlord of Uttarpara named Mukhujaya, who was quite old. But he only listened to stories from novels."

Sri Ramakrishna: "There is one more thing mentioned in the Adhyatma: that God Himself is the world and its living beings."

The Pundit delightedly recites some verses of Yamalarjuna pertaining to this; they are from the tenth chapter of the Srimad Bhagavata:[3]

> O Krishna, Krishna, great yogin! You are the supreme, primordial being. The wise know Your form as this universe, manifest and unmanifest.
>
> You are the one ruler over the senses, the ego, the vital force, and the bodies of all creatures. You are truly time, the blessed Lord Vishnu, the all-pervading ruler.
>
> You are the great Prakriti, subtle and consisting of sattva, rajas, and tamas; truly You are Purusha, the witness of change in all spheres of action.

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi – one will have to come here who sincerely practices meditation and japa

Listening to the hymn, he stands in samadhi. The pundit remains seated. Placing one foot on the pundit's lap and chest, Thakur smiles.

Holding the foot, the pundit says, "Oh Guru, illumine me!" Thakur is standing near the smaller cot, facing east.

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1. Suduram.
2. Aduram.
3. Srimad Bhagavata, X:10:29 to 31.

After the pundit has left, Thakur says to M., "My words are coming true. Those who have practiced meditation and japa sincerely will have to come here."

It is already 10 p.m. After taking a small, simple meal of farina pudding, Thakur lies on his bed. He says to Mani, "Stroke my feet a little."

After a while, he asks M. to stroke his body and chest.

Taking a short nap, he says to Mani, "You may go to sleep now. Let me see if I can fall asleep alone." In a little while, he says to Ramlal, "He (Mani) and Rakhal can sleep in the room."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and Jesus Christ

It is daybreak.[1] Thakur rises and meditates on the Divine Mother. Because of his illness, the devotees are not able to hear the sweet chanting of God's name. After his morning ablutions, Thakur comes in the room and sits down. He says to Mani, "Well, why am I suffering this illness?"

Mani: "Sir, people won't have the courage to go through all these things unless you do. A person sees that you are suffering so much physically, but even then you know nothing but God."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Balaram also said, 'If you suffer like this, how can we be spared?'

1. 28 August 1885.

"When Rama couldn't lift the bow because of his pain of separation from Sita, Lakshmana was astonished. 'Bound by the five elements, even Brahman laments.'"

Mani: "Jesus Christ also wept like an ordinary man to see the suffering of his devotees."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How did it happen?"

Mani: "Martha and Mary, two sisters, and their brother Lazarus were devotees of Jesus. Lazarus died. Jesus was going to their house. On the way, one sister (Mary) went up to him and fell at his feet. Weeping bitterly, she said, 'Lord, if only you had come earlier, he would not have died.' Seeing her cry, Jesus also began to weep."

Sri Ramakrishna and miracles

"Then Jesus went to his grave and called him by name. Immediately Lazarus came back to life and arose."[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "But I don't do such things."

Mani: "That is because you don't want to. Those are occult powers, so you don't practice them. If you did, people's minds would turn to their bodies, and not to pure love for God. That's why you don't do them.

"There are many similarities between you and Jesus Christ."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What similarities?"

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1. Luke 11: 132-44.

Mani: "You don't ask devotees to keep fasts or take to severe practices, You have no strict restrictions about food. Jesus Christ's disciples ate on the Sabbath which was against the rules.[1] That's why the people who strictly followed the scriptural rules showed their displeasure. Jesus said, 'They have done well to eat**.** As long as they are with the bridegroom, they must enjoy themselves.'"[2]

Sri Ramakrishna: "What does it mean?"

Mani: "That his disciples will only enjoy themselves as long as they are with the incarnation of God. Why should they be in sorrow? It is only when the incarnation returns to his abode in heaven that they will face the suffering and sorrows of life."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "And is there any more similarity?"

Mani: "Sir, as you say that 'lust and greed' has not entered into the youngsters, they will be able to internalize religious instructions. For instance, that you can keep milk in a new pot, but if it's put in a pot used for making curds, it will turn sour. He said things like that."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What did he say?"

Mani: "If you put new wine in an old wineskin, it can burst.[3] And if you patch an old cloth with a new piece, it will tear quickly.

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1. Mark 2:26-27.
2. Matthew 9:15.
3. Mark 2:22.

"Also, just as you say, 'The Divine Mother and I are one,' he used to say, 'I and my Father are one.'"[1]

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Anything else?"

Mani: "Well, you say, 'If you call on Him with a yearning heart, He is sure to listen to you.' Jesus also said, 'Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.'"[2]

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, if God incarnates as a human being, is He a full manifestation, or a portion or a fraction? Some people say it is full."

Mani: "Sir, whether He incarnates as a full manifestation or a portion or a fraction, I don't completely understand. But what you said, I have understood fully – a round hole in a wall."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Tell me about it."

Mani: "There is a round hole in a wall. You can see a little bit of the field beyond the wall through this hole. Similarly, you can have a little glimpse of the infinite God through you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, you can very clearly see five or six miles[3] beyond."

After a dip in the Ganges at the chandni, Mani returns to Thakur's room. It is eight o'clock in the morning.

Mani asks Latu for some rice prasad[4] of Jagannath.

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1. John 10:30.
2. Matthew 7:7.
3. Two or three kosas.
4. Atka.

Coming close to Mani, Sri Ramakrishna says, "Eat prasad regularly. A real devotee cannot take his meals without some prasad."

Mani: "Sir, I brought some prasad of Jagannath from Balaram's house yesterday. I eat a grain or two of it every day."

Mani salutes Thakur and asks him for permission to leave. Thakur says to him affectionately, "Yes, go early in the morning. The hot sun of the rainy season[1] is harmful."

1. The month of Bhadra.

Section XXVI

Thakur with Devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple on Janmashtami Festival Day

Chapter I

Coming of Subodh – Purna, M., Gangadhar, Kshirode, and Nitai

Sri Ramakrishna is resting in his room. It is 8 p.m. on Monday, 31st of August 1885, 16th of Bhadra, the 6th day of the dark fortnight of Shravana.

Thakur is unwell. It is the beginning of his throat trouble. But he remains constantly thinking, day and night, of the spiritual welfare of the devotees. Sometimes he worries about his illness like a child. But the very next moment, forgetting everything, he is intoxicated with intense love for God. He becomes almost mad with love for the devotees, like a mother.

Two days ago, last Saturday night, Purna had written in a letter to Thakur: "I feel immense joy. Sometimes, because of the joy, I cannot sleep at night."

When the letter had been read to Thakur, he had said, "The hair of my body stands on end to hear this. His state of joy will last. Let me see the letter."

Folding it and pressing it in the palm of his hand, he had said, "Usually I can't touch letters. But this is a good letter."

Thakur rests a while in bed. Suddenly, perspiring, he sits up and says, "I feel that I will not be cured of this disease."

All the devotees are worried to hear this from him.

The Holy Mother has arrived to serve Thakur and is living very quietly in the nahabat. Most of the devotees have no idea that she lives there. A woman devotee (Golap Ma) is also living in the nahabat. She frequently comes to Thakur's room to visit him.

Thakur said to her yesterday, Sunday, "You have been here for many days. What will people think? You'd better go home and stay there for ten days or so." M. heard this conversation.

Today is Monday. Thakur is not well. It is about 8 o'clock at night. He is lying on the small cot on his back, his head toward the south. After dusk Gangadhar[1] came with M. from Calcutta. He is now sitting at Thakur's feet. Thakur is talking to M.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Two boys came here. The great-grandson of Shankar Ghosh, his daughter's son (Subodh),[2] and another boy (Kshirode) from their neighborhood. Both of them are good boys. I am not well now. I have asked them to go to you for instruction. Do please look after them a little."

M.: "Yes, sir. They live in our neighborhood."

Beginning of Thakur's illness – Dr. Bhagavan – Dr. Nitai

Sri Ramakrishna: "The other day I woke up in a sweat. What can this illness be?"

M.: "Sir, we have decided to have you examined by Dr. Bhagavan Rudra. He is an MD and a very good doctor."

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1. Later Swami Akhandananda.
2. Later Swami Subodhananda.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What will he charge?"

M.: "He charges twenty or twenty-five rupees from others."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Then leave it alone."

M.: "But sir, we will not pay more than four or five rupees."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, if you ask him this way, 'Be kind enough to come and see him.' Has he not heard anything about this place?"

M.: "It seems he has. He has indicated that he wouldn't charge, but we will pay him so he will visit again."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It would be better if you called (Dr.) Nitai. After all, what do these doctors do when they come here? They only aggravate it by pressing the throat."

It is 9 p.m. Thakur sits up to take a little farina pudding.

He feels no discomfort in eating. He says to M. happily, "I've been able to eat a little. I am feeling very happy."

Chapter II

Janmashtami Day – with Narendra, Ram, Girish, and others

(Balaram, M., Gopal's Mother, Rakhal, Latu, the younger Naren, the sadhu from Punjab, Navagopal, the Vaishnavas of Katoa, and Dr. Rakhal)

It is Janmashtami,[1] Tuesday, 1 September 1885, 17th of Bhadra. Thakur is going to take a bath. A devotee massages him with oil while he sits on the southern verandah. Returning from a dip in the Ganges, M. salutes him.

After Thakur's bath, clad in a towel and facing south, he salutes the deities from the verandah. Because of ill health, he is not able to visit the Kali Temple or Vishnu temples.

It is the anniversary of Krishna's birth. Ram and other devotees have brought new clothes for Thakur. He puts them on – a dhoti from Vrindavan and a red silk cloth for the upper body. His pure body looks charming in these new clothes. When he has put them on, he salutes the deities.

Gopal's Mother has prepared some food for Gopala[2] and brought it from Kamarhatti. When she arrives, she says sadly to Thakur, "But you won't eat any of it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You see, I'm not well."

Gopal's Mother: "My misfortune! Please have a little in your hand."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Please bless me."

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1. Anniversary of Krishna's birth.
2. Baby Krishna.

Understanding him to be her Gopala, Gopal's Mother feeds Thakur.

The devotees have brought sugar candy. Gopal's Mother says, "Let me take this candy to the nahabat." Sri Ramakrishna says, "I have to give it to the devotees. It's difficult to keep asking for it from the nahabat. Leave it here."

> It is eleven o'clock. The devotees of Calcutta are arriving one by one: Balaram, Narendra, the younger Naren, Navagopal, and a Vaishnava devotee from Katoa. Rakhal and Latu are living here. A sadhu from the Punjab has been staying in the panchavati for some time.

The younger Naren has a tumor on his forehead. While strolling in the panchavati, Ramakrishna says, "Why don't you get this lump removed? It's not on the throat, it's on the forehead. It wouldn't harm you. People even have surgery to treat swollen testicles." (*Laughter.*)

The Punjabi sadhu is going along the garden path. Thakur says, "I don't attract him. He has the disposition of a jnani. I see him as a dry piece of wood."

Thakur returns to his room. They talk about Shyamapada Bhattacharya.

Balaram: "He said, 'The ecstasy Narendra felt when Thakur placed his foot on his chest I didn't experience.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you know why? It's very difficult to concentrate a mind scattered by 'lust

and greed.' He has to hold a village court.[1] He said so. And he has to worry about his children. Narendra's and the other youngsters' minds are not scattered. 'Lust and greed' have not yet entered into them.

"But he (Shyamapada) is a great person."

The Vaishnava from Katoa is asking Thakur questions. He is a bit squint-eyed.

Discussion about previous lives – taking birth to gain love for God

Vaishnava: "Sir, is there another life after this one?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The Gita says, 'A man is reborn with the same tendencies he had at the time of his death.' King Bharata was born as a deer because he was thinking of his deer in his last moments."

Vaishnava: "I could believe this if someone had seen it with his own eyes and told me."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I don't know, my dear. I'm unable to cure myself of disease, how can I tell you what happens after death?

"What you are talking about is a matter of petty intelligence. Make an effort to attain love for God. You have taken birth as a human being only for that. You have come to the garden to eat mangoes. What need is there to know how many thousands of branches and how many millions of leaves there are

1. Panchayat, "acting as an arbiter."

in the garden? What is the use of knowledge about what happens after death?"

Girish Ghosh and avatarhood – who is holy? He who has faith and love for God

Girish Ghosh arrives by carriage with a couple of friends. He is drunk. Weeping when he comes in, he places his head on Thakur's feet, still crying.

Sri Ramakrishna pats his back affectionately. He calls a devotee and says, "Prepare a smoke for him."

Raising his head, Girish says with folded hands, "You alone are the full manifestation of Brahman.[1] If this is not true, everything is false. I have been regretting that I could not serve you." (These words are said so tenderly that one or two devotees begin to weep).

"Oh Lord, grant a boon that I may serve you for a year. Who cares for salvation? I don't give a damn. Tell me, may I serve you for a year?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "People here are not nice. They could say something about it."

Girish: "No, that will not be. Grant that –"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, serve me when I go to your house."

Girish: "No. Let me serve you here."

Sri Ramakrishna (*seeing that he won't relent*): "All right, let it be as God wills."

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1. Purna Brahman, or Brahman in His absolute fullness. "Manifestation" implies partialness and differentiation; this is the unmanifest Whole.

Thakur's illness is in his throat. Girish says, "Say that you will be cured. All right. I will expel it magically. Kali! Kali!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Will it cure the disease?"

Girish: "Get well! (*Blowing at the throat*) Phuh. If you are not cured, then you will be with the love and devotion I have for you. Say that you are cured."

Sri Ramakrishna (*irritated*): "Go away. I can't say those things. I can't ask the Divine Mother to cure the illness. Alright, it will be according to God's will."

Girish: "You are deceiving me! It depends on your will."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Shame! Don't say such a thing. I am only a devotee and not Krishna. You may think what you like. You may look on your guru as God, but it is wrong to talk that way. You must not say such a thing."

Girish: "Say that you will be cured."

Sri Ramakrishna: "All right. Whatever has come about will go away."

According to his mood, Girish addresses Thakur now and then, "Well, dear sir, why haven't you come in your beautiful form this time?"

Later, he adds, "Perhaps this time it will save Bengal."

> Some devotees say to themselves, "Is it just for saving Bengal? It will be the whole world!"

Girish again says, "Why is he here? Does anybody understand? He has come down out of compassion for the sorrows of mankind – to save them."

The coachman has been calling. Girish rises and goes to him. Sri Ramakrishna says to M., "See where he is going. I hope he doesn't beat him." M. follows Girish.

Girish returns and recites a prayer to Thakur, "O Lord, grant that I may be so pure that I may never have a sinful thought."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But you are already pure. You have faith and love for God. Aren't you already in a joyful state?"

Girish: "No, sir. The mind is sick. No peace. That's why I drink so much wine."

After a while Girish adds, "Lord, I am surprised that I am serving the Supreme Brahman.[1] What austerities did I perform that I am eligible for this service?"

Thakur has his midday meal. Because of his illness, he eats only a little very simple food.

He is always in a state of ecstasy, forcing his mind down to bring it to his body. But like a child he is unable to take care of the body. Childlike, he says to the devotees, "I have eaten a little. Now I'd like to lie down. You may go outside a little while."

Thakur has a little rest. The devotees seat themselves again in his room.

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1. Brahman in His full manifestation, Purna Brahman.

Girish Ghosh – guru is one's spiritual ideal – two kinds of devotees

Girish: "Yes sir, the guru and the spiritual ideal. I am fond of the form of the guru! I don't fear him. Why is that? Whenever I see a person in ecstasy, I run away from him ten cubits. I fear it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The spiritual ideal itself comes as the guru. After practicing meditation on a corpse,[1] when a person gets the vision of the chosen ideal, the guru himself comes and says to the disciple, 'O disciple, this is your ideal.' Saying this, the guru merges into the form of the chosen ideal. The disciple then no longer sees the guru. When one attains the ultimate knowledge, who can be the guru and who can be the disciple? This is a very difficult situation, where there is no difference between the disciple and the guru."

Devotee: "The head of the guru and feet of the disciple."

Girish (*happily*): "Yes!"

Navagopal: "Listen to the meaning. The head of the disciple belongs to the guru, just as the feet of the guru belong to the disciple. Do you understand?"

Girish: "No, that is not the meaning. Doesn't a son climb up on his father's shoulder? So it says 'the feet of the disciple.'"

Navagopal: "That happens only when the son feels like an infant."

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1. Shava sadhana.

His earlier story – Sikh devotees – two classes of devotees: baby monkeys and kittens

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are two kinds of devotees: One kind has the nature of a kitten – absolute dependence on what the mother may do. It only knows how to meow. It doesn't know where it is going, or what it will do. The mother cat sometimes puts it in the kitchen and sometimes on a bed. In the same way, a devotee gives the power of attorney to God. Having given God the power of attorney, he is free from any anxiety.

"The Sikhs said, 'God is kind.' I said, 'He is our mother and father, why say He is kind? If after giving birth to children, shouldn't the parents bring them up? Should the neighbours do it? This kind of devotee really believes that He is our own mother and our own father.'

"There is another class of devotee. They have the nature of a young monkey. A young monkey holds onto its mother with all its strength. These devotees feel they have some duty to perform – to go on pilgrimage, to practice japa and spiritual disciplines, to worship with sixteen items – and that only then will they be able to hold onto God. This is their attitude.

"Both types are devotees. (*To the devotees*) The more you proceed towards God, the more you will see that God Himself has become everything, that it is He who is doing everything. He is the guru and He Himself is the spiritual ideal. It is He Himself who has granted you spiritual knowledge and love for God."

His earlier story – advice to Keshab Sen: go forward

"The farther you proceed, the more you will see that there is something beyond the sandalwood forest – silver mines, gold mines, and diamonds and jewels. Therefore, go forward.

"But how can I even say, 'Go forward?' When householders go too far, their world falls away. Once Keshab Sen was conducting a worship. He said, 'Oh God, may we drown in the river of Your love!' When the service was over, I said to him, 'My dear, can you drown yourself in a river of love? What then would happen to those who are sitting behind the screen?' But please do this. Dive every now and then and then get back to the bank." (*All laugh.*)

Chattering of Vaishnava – 'one must bring injunctions into practice' – truthfulness is austerity

The Vaishnava from Katoa is arguing with Thakur. Thakur says to him, 'Stop all this chattering. When butter contains water, it produces a sizzling sound.'

"Once a person has tasted the bliss of God, the tendency to argue vanishes. When a bee tastes the joy of sipping honey, it no longer buzzes.

"What will you achieve with talk after reading books? How many verses the pundits quote – 'Shirna Gokulmandali' ("The group in Gokul has shrunk") and so forth.

"What will you gain by just repeating 'hemp, hemp?' Even if you rinse your mouth with it, nothing happens. It has to go into the stomach.

Only then will you feel intoxicated. Without calling on God in solitude and with yearning, all these things cannot be internalized."

Doctor Rakhal arrives to examine Thakur, who says to him eagerly, "Please come and sit down." The conversation with the Vaishnava continues.

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are ordinary men and men with awakened minds.[1] A man who is spiritually conscious is awake. Without spiritual consciousness, birth as a human being is futile."

His earlier story – settling of disputes by a truthful and religious person

"In our village there are many people with pot-bellies and mustaches. But good people are brought from several miles away in a palanquin because they are truthful and religious. They are brought to settle disputes. They don't bring those who are mere pundits.

"Truthfulness is the austerity of the Kaliyuga. Truthfulness, dependence on God, and looking upon other men's wives as mother – these are the means."

Like a child, Thakur says to the doctor, "Sir, please cure me of this."

Doctor: "Can I cure you?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "A doctor is the Lord Himself. I honour all."

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1. *Manushya* means "human being," and *manhosha* "awakened mind."

Reconciliation of free will and God's will – liberty and necessity – God Himself is the mahout Narayana

"If you say I should remain quiet because everyone is God, I believe in the mahout Narayana as well.[1]

"Pure mind and pure atman are one and the same. What comes to a pure mind is God Himself. He is Himself the mahout Narayana.

"Why shouldn't I listen to Him? God alone is the doer. As long as He keeps my 'I-ness' in me, so long will I act according to His instruction."

The doctor is now going to examine Thakur's throat. Thakur says, "Doctor Mahendra Sarkar pressed my tongue the way they press a cow's tongue."

Thakur touches the doctor's shirt and says to him again, like a child, "Sir, please cure me of this."

Seeing the laryngoscope, Thakur laughs and says, "I understand – you will see the image of my throat in it."

Narendra sings. Because of Thakur's illness, not many songs are sung.

Chapter III

Doctor Bhagavan Rudra and Sri Ramakrishna

After taking his midday meal, Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on his bed, talking to Doctor Bhagavan Rudra.

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1. A reference to the fable of the Lord as the Elephant Driver, told several times by Thakur.

M., Rakhal, Latu, and some other devotees are also in the room.

It is Wednesday, 2 September 1885, 18th of Bhadra, the eighth to ninth day of the month of Shravana, the day of the Nanda Festival. The doctor hears all about Thakur's disease.

Thakur comes down to the floor and sits near the doctor.

Sri Ramakrishna: "You see, I can't tolerate the medicine. I have a different constitution."

Touching money, tying knots, saving – all these are impossible for Thakur

"Well, what do you think about this? My hand becomes twisted when I touch money and my breathing stops. And if I tie a knot, I can't breathe till the knot is untied."

After saying this, he asks for a rupee. The doctor is left speechless by what he sees: the hand on which the rupee coin is placed twists and Thakur's breathing stops. When the rupee is removed, Thakur exhales three long breaths one after the other and his hand again relaxes.

The doctor says to M., "It is action on the nerves."

His earlier story – saving opium in Sambhu Mallick's garden – picking mangoes in the native village of Kamarpukur – saving impossible

Thakur says to the doctor again, "There's another thing. I can't save anything at all. One day I went to Sambhu Mallick's garden. I had great stomach trouble and Sambhu said, 'Take a little

opium bit by bit. It will make you feel better.' He tied a little in a corner of my cloth. When I was returning, I began to wander around at the gate – I couldn't find the way. When I threw the opium away, I regained my normal state and returned to the temple garden.

"One day in my village, I picked some mangoes to take home, but then I couldn't walk. I remained standing in one place. When I put the mangoes in a pit, only then could I return home. Well, what do you think of this?"

Doctor: "There is special power behind it – will power."

Mani: "He says it is the Lord's power. But you say it is will power."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "And then if someone says, 'You are better,' at once I feel much better. The other day the brahmin woman said, 'You are fifty percent better.' I immediately began to dance."

Thakur is pleased with the doctor's nature. He tells him, "You have a fine nature. There are two signs of a person who has attained knowledge: a serene temperament and absence of pride."

Mani: "He (the doctor) has lost his wife."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "I tell you that God can be attained if one has these three attractions combined: a mother's love for her child, the love a chaste woman for her husband, and the love of a worldly person for his possessions.

"Sir, please cure me however you can."

The doctor is now going to examine the diseased throat. Thakur sits on a chair in the semicircular verandah. First he talks of Doctor Sarkar, "The rascal! He pressed my tongue as if it was a cow's!"

Doctor Bhagavan: "I don't think he meant to."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, it's not that. He pressed it so he could examine it properly."

Section XXVII

With Doctor Sarkar, Narendra, Sashi, Sarat, M., Girish, and Others at the Shyampukur House

Chapter I

His earlier story – in a state of God-intoxication, behind the kuthi, Thakur feels his body burnt by a sacrificial fire – Pundit Padmalochan's faith and his death

For treatment of his illness, Sri Ramakrishna is living with devotees in a house at Shyampukur. Today is Friday, 23 October 1885, the day of the full moon.[1]The time is 10:00 in the morning. Thakur is talking with M., who is helping him with his socks.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Would it be all right to cut my woolen scarf to wrap around my legs to warm them?"

Yesterday, on Thursday night, Sri Ramakrishna had a long conversation with Dr. Sarkar.[2] Referring to it, Thakur laughs and says to M., "Yesterday I told him the story about saying 'You, you[3] [the calf and egotism being the cause of all suffering].'"

Sri Ramakrishna had said, "A person keeps getting scalded by the three fires of the world,[4] yet

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1. Kojagar Purnima.
2. See Volume I, Section XV.
3. Tuhum, tuhum. For the complete story of the calf, see Volume I, Section XV, Chapter II.
4. Three afflictions or fires of the world: Adhidaivika, misfortunes caused by natural disasters or the forces of nature; adhibhautika,

says it is alright. A sharp thorn cuts into his hand and he bleeds profusely, yet he says, 'There's nothing wrong with my hand.' This thorn has to be burnt in the fire of spiritual knowledge."

The younger Naren, remembering it, says, "What you said about the thorn was nice. Burn it in the fire of spiritual knowledge!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "I had the experience of this myself. One day when I was walking behind the kuthi, my body felt like it was ablaze in a sacrificial fire.

"Padmalochan said, 'I will call an assembly of people and talk about your experiences.' But he died soon after."

The time is eleven o'clock. Mani has taken news of Thakur to Dr Sarkar at his house. Hearing about Thakur's condition, the doctor speaks of him and shows his eagerness to hear more.

Doctor (*smiling*): "How well I said yesterday, 'To say 'You, you,' first you have to fall into the hands of a carder!'"

Mani: "That's true, sir. Unless you fall into the hands of a real guru, your ego doesn't disappear. And how nicely he talked about love for God. Bhakti is a woman and can go right into the inner apartments."

Doctor: "Yes, these really are beautiful words. But you still can't give up jnana."

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misfortunes caused by other living beings, i.e. war, physical or verbal assault, attacks of animals, snake bites, and so on; adhyatmika, misfortunes arising from the harm we do ourselves by mental anguish, addictions, and self-destructive behavior.

Mani: "The Paramahamsa Deva doesn't say that. He accepts both knowledge and love – God with form and God without form. He says that the cooling power of love for God has formed water into ice, but when the sun of knowledge rises, the ice melts again. In other words, you realize God with form through love, and the formless Absolute through knowledge.

"And we have noticed that he feels God is so very near that he's always talking with Him. Like a small boy, he says, 'Mother, it hurts a lot.'

"And what powers of observation he has! He saw some fossils in the museum. Immediately he found in them a simile for holy company. Just as they [the fossils] have become stone by dwelling near stones, one becomes holy by associating with the holy."

Doctor: "Yesterday Ishan Babu was harping on the subject of the incarnation of God. 'What is an incarnation after all! It is calling a man God!'"

Mani: "But such is his faith. What is the use of interfering with it?"

Doctor: "You're right, it would be of no use."

Mani: "And how he made us laugh when he said, 'Someone saw that a certain house had collapsed, but it wasn't mentioned in the newspaper, so no one would believe it.'"

The doctor keeps quiet because Thakur has said to him, "Your science does not mention incarnations of God, so there is no incarnation of God."

It is midday. The doctor gets into the carriage with Mani. After visiting some other patients, he will go to examine Sri Ramakrishna.

The other day the doctor was invited by Girish to see the play *Buddha Lila*. Now sitting in the carriage, he says to Mani, "It would have been better to call Buddha the incarnation of compassion. Why was he called an incarnation of Vishnu?"

The Doctor drops Mani at the crossing of Hedua road.

Chapter II

Thakur in the state of a Paramahamsa – seeing joy spreading like fog all around – vision of Mother of the Universe seeming to say, 'Come delusion, come illusion!'

It is about 3 o'clock. One or two devotees are sitting with Thakur. Impatient like a child, he asks repeatedly, "When is the doctor coming? What time is it now?" The doctor is to come this evening.

Suddenly Thakur goes into the mood of a child. Taking a pillow on his lap, he holds it maternally, as if nursing a child. Then he laughs like a child and, in ecstasy, and puts on his dhoti in a strange way. Mani and the others watch him in amazement.

In a little while the ecstatic mood diminishes. It is time for his meal. He eats a little farina pudding and talks to Mani alone about a very secret experience.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Do you know what I just saw in a state of ecstasy? A vast meadow extending six or eight miles[1] through which the road to Sihore runs. I was alone in that field. I saw a fifteen- or sixteen-year old boy paramahamsa, like the one I had seen earlier under the banyan tree.

"I was surrounded on all sides by a mist of joy when a boy thirteen or fourteen years old raised his head out of the mist. He looked like Purna. Both of us were naked. We began running around the field and playing.

"Purna felt thirsty. He drank water from a glass and then offered it to me. I said, 'My dear, I can't drink your leftovers.' Then he laughed and went away to wash the glass. He brought me fresh water in it."

Dreadful and fearful Mother – She shows that everything is a spell

Thakur again goes into samadhi. Returning to normal consciousness, he resumes his conversation with Mani.

"My mental attitude has changed. I can no longer eat the holy food offered to the deities. The Real and the apparent have become the same to me. Do you know what I saw? A divine form, the Mother of the Universe, with a child in her womb. She gave birth to it and then swallowed it again. As much as went into Her became empty. She was showing me that everything is empty.

1. Three to four kosas.

"She seemed to be saying, 'Come, delusion; come illusion! Come!'"

Mani reflects on Thakur's saying, "Only the magician is real, all else is illusion."

Occult powers are not good – occult powers are of a lower order

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, I tried to attract Purna, but I couldn't. It weakens my faith a little."

Mani: "But that would be occult power."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, downright occult power."

Mani: "When we were returning to Dakshineswar with you from Adhar Sen's house, a bottle broke in the carriage. Somebody said, 'Is that going to cause any trouble?' You said, 'I can't bother about that. That would be using occult power.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "In the same way sickly boys are made to lie on the ground where Hari's name is chanted so they may get well. Curing disease using occult powers is an act of miracle. Those who call upon the Lord for healing a disease have a very low spiritual ideal."

Chapter III

Ultimate spiritual knowledge – the body and Self are different – Thakur's life as told by him

It is evening. Sitting on his bed, Thakur is meditating on the Divine Mother and chanting Her name. A number of devotees are sitting silently near him.

After a while Dr. Sarkar arrives. Latu, Sashi,[1] the younger Naren, Paltu, and many other devotees are present. Ramtaran of the Star Theatre has come with Girish. He is going to sing.

Doctor (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Last night at three o'clock, I was very worried about you. It had rained and I wondered if the doors and windows of your room had been closed or left open. How could I know?"

Sri Ramakrishna is happy with the doctor's affection and says, "What are you saying, my dear? As long as you have a body, you have to take care of it. But I see that it is separate from the Self. When you are completely rid of the attachment to 'lust and greed,' you realize that the body and the Self are different from each other. When the water in a coconut dries up completely, the shell and the kernel separate from each other. Then you can feel the kernel rattling inside the shell. Or, take another example, a sword and its sheath.

"The sword is separate from the sheath. That's why I can't ask the Divine Mother to cure the disease of my body."

Girish: "Pundit Shashadhar said to him [Sri Ramakrishna], 'Please bring your mind to your body in samadhi. That will get rid of your disease.' But he had seen in ecstasy that the body was rattling like a skeleton."

1. Later Swami Ramakrishnananda.

His earlier story – visit to the museum – his prayer in pain

Sri Ramakrishna: "Long ago I was very ill. I was sitting in the Kali Temple. I felt like praying to the Divine Mother for help, but I couldn't do it for myself. I said, 'Mother, Hriday asked me to speak to you about my illness.' I couldn't say more. While I was saying it, I suddenly remembered the Asiatic Society Museum. It had a skeleton of human bones tied together with wires. Immediately I said, 'Mother, please tie this body with wires like the skeleton so I can go around chanting your name and glories.' I couldn't ask for any occult powers.

"In the beginning Hriday said to me – you see, in those days I was under Hriday's care – 'Ask the Divine Mother for some power.' And what a sight I saw when I went to the Kali temple to ask for power! I saw a widow prostitute thirty or thirty-five years old shamelessly opening her cloth and excreting. I became angry with Hriday because he told me to pray for occult powers."

Ramtaran's song – Thakur in ecstasy

Ramtaran sings now:

Behold my beloved vina, strung with special care,

For him who plays it tenderly, its strings tuned neither high nor low, its sweetness flows in a hundred streams.

But if the strings are slack, they will be mute, and over-stretched, they will break in two.

Doctor (*to Girish*): "Are these songs original?"

Girish: "No, they are adapted from Edwin Arnold."

Ramtaran first sings a song from a play of Buddha's life:

We cry for rest, but where to find it?

We know not from where we have come, nor to where we will float away.

We return again and again, weeping and laughing without end,

And always wondering where we may go.

O Awakened One, let me also awaken.

How long will it take for my dream to end?

The awakened sleep no more.

But for now a dense and dreadful darkness lies all around.

Destroy this darkness! Be my light!

Except for you, there is no way. And so I seek refuge at your feet.

Thakur goes into samadhi listening to the song. Then Ramtaran sings again:

Blow, blow, O raging storm…

Vision of god, the sun

When the song is over, Thakur says, "What have you done? Why the bitter soup of neem leaves after rice pudding?

"As soon as you sang, 'Destroy this darkness,' I saw the darkness all around dispelled by the rising sun. And everyone taking refuge at the feet of the sun."

Ramtaran sings again, first:

O Mother, saviour of the helpless, You are the slayer of evil. In You the three qualities of sattva, rajas, and tamas dwell.

You, who create, preserve, and dissolve the world, are with form as well as Formless. O my Mother, truly You manifest in every form.[1]

And then:

My devotion and worship have come to an end; no longer can I offer worship to Mother Shyama,

And by no means can I control the mind. Oh, how it torments me! For shame!

Hearing this song, Thakur again goes into samadhi.

O Mother, who has offered these heaps of red hibiscus flowers at Your feet?

Chapter IV

The ecstasy of younger Naren and others – duties of monks and householders

The song is over. Most of the devotees sit silently, deeply touched. The younger Naren is absorbed in meditation, sitting motionless like a wooden figure.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor, pointing at the younger Naren*): "He is very pure – untouched by the least trace of worldly thoughts."

The doctor looks at younger Naren, who is still in meditation.

1. For complete song refer to Volume III, Section XXII, Chapter III.

Manomohan (*laughing, to the doctor*): "About your son, he [Ramakrishna] says, 'If I have the son, I don't care about the father.'"

Doctor: "That's it! That's why I say that you forget everything else when thinking of the child. (that is, you are occupied with the incarnation or the devotee and forget God)."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "It's not that I don't want the Father."

Doctor: "I understand. How can you do without saying a few things like this?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Your son really is guileless. Sambhu's face reddened when he said, 'God is bound to listen if you call on Him sincerely.' Do you know why I love these boys so much? They are like pure milk that only needs to be brought to a boil to be offered to the deity. Watery milk has to be boiled quite a bit. A lot of firewood is wasted.

"These boys are like unused earthen pots – they are good receptacles. Milk can be put in them without a care. Talk to them just a little about spiritual knowledge and their consciousness is awakened. Worldly people are not easily awakened. It is always risky to keep milk in a pot that's been used for curds. It might go bad.

"Worldliness – 'lust and greed' – hasn't touched your son."

Doctor: "That's because he's living off his father's earnings! I'd like to see if he'd remain untouched by worldliness if he had to earn his own living."

Monk and renunciation of woman – monk and renunciation of gold

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's true! That's certainly true. But the fact is that God is very far away from worldliness. Otherwise, He is as near as the palm of the hand. (*To Doctor Sarkar and Doctor Dokari*) Renunciation of 'lust and greed' is not for you. You only have to renounce them mentally. I said the same thing to the goswamis, 'Why do you talk about renunciation? It won't do for you to renounce – you have to attend to the worship of Shyamasundar.'

"Renunciation is for sannyasins. They shouldn't even see the picture of a woman. Women are like poison for them. They must keep at least ten cubits away or, if that's not possible, at least one cubit. Even if a woman is a great devotee, a sannyasin shouldn't talk to her for long.

"A sannyasin should live in a place where he doesn't even see the face of a woman, or very rarely.

"Money is also a poison for sannyasins. When you have money, you quickly fall prey to anxiety, pride, physical comfort, anger, and so forth. Rajas increases. When there is rajoguna, it leads to tamoguna. So a sannyasin shouldn't touch money. 'Lust and greed' make you forget God."

Advice to the doctor – right use of money – wife for a householder

"But you know, money buys food and clothing and a place to live. It also provides for worship of the Lord and for holy men and devotees.

"But hoarding it is useless. A bee takes great trouble to make its hive. But then someone comes and breaks into it and takes away the honey."

The Doctor: "For whom does one save? Perhaps for the sake of a bad son!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Not just a bad son alone. Maybe your wife is of easy virtue. She may even give away your watch and chain to her lover.

"You don't have to renounce women altogether. It's not wrong to sleep with your own wife. But after you've had children, you should live like brother and sister.

"If you are attached to 'lust and greed,' you develop pride of learning, pride of wealth and high position – all these things."

Chapter V

Advice to Dr. Sarkar – pride is not good – ego of knowledge is good – it enables one to teach others

Sri Ramakrishna: "Unless you give up pride, you can't attain spiritual knowledge. Water doesn't stay on the top of a mound. It flows down quickly on all sides to the ground below."

Doctor: "The water that comes down to the lower ground from all sides is both good and bad. It can be muddy and full of sewage, too. And there are hollows on the tops of hills – for instance, in Nanital and Mansarovar – where you have only pure water from the sky."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Only water from the sky. Ah, beautiful!"

Doctor: "And water from a higher level flows down in all directions."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Someone got a siddha mantra.[1] He stood on the top of a hill and shouted to the people below, 'You can realize God if you repeat this mantra.'"

Doctor: "Yes."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But then, there is a problem. When your soul is full of yearning for God, you don't see any difference between good water and dirty water. To know God, one might go to a good person, but sometimes also to people who are ignorant. But when His grace descends, even the turbid water does no harm. When He grants Knowledge, He tells everything – which water is good and which bad.

"There can be low ground on the top of a hill, but not on the hill of the 'rascal I.' The pure water from the sky only collects when there is the 'I of knowledge,' or the 'I of a devotee.'

"The water from a higher level can no doubt flow in all directions, but it is only possible if it comes down from the hill of the 'ego of knowledge.'

"Without receiving God's command, a person can't teach other people. Shankaracharya retained the 'I of knowledge' after attaining Knowledge in order to teach mankind. But lecturing without

1. A mantra that leads to perfection.

having attained Him! What good can it do for people?"

His earlier story – Samadhyayi's lecture – visit to Nandan Bagan Brahmo Samaj

"I went to the Nandan Bagan Brahmo Samaj. After worship, the leader lectured from a podium. While reading his prepared lecture, he looked all around. Even while meditating, he opened his eyes to see now and then.

"A person who hasn't realized God can't give right instruction. He may say one thing correctly but the next thing he says is totally confusing.

"Samadhyayi gave a lecture in which he said, 'God is beyond mind and speech. He is without sweetness and bliss. You must sing His glories with the sweetness of your own love and devotion.' Look at how he describes Him who is the very fountain of sweetness and bliss, the essence of joy! What will such a lecture do? Can it teach anybody?

"Someone said, 'My maternal uncle has a cowshed full of horses.' Horses in a cowshed! (*Everyone laughs.*) This can only mean that there are no horses there."

Doctor (*smiling*): "There are no cows either." (*All laugh.*)

The devotees who had been enraptured regain their normal mood. The doctor is enjoying them.

He asks M., "Who is that person?" M. introduces Paltu, the younger Naren, Bhupati, Sarat, Sashi,

and the other young devotees by pointing to them one after the other.

About Sashi,[1] M. says, "He is going to take his B.A. examination."

The doctor's mind has gone elsewhere.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor*): "Look here, listen to what he's saying."

The doctor hears about Sashi.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the doctor, pointing to M.,*): "He teaches school boys."

The Doctor: "That's what I heard."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How amazing! I'm unlettered but educated people come here. Isn't it surprising? You have to admit that it's God's play."

Today is the Kojagar Purnima[2] day, about half past nine in the evening. The doctor has been here watching everything since six o'clock.

Girish (*to the doctor*): "Well, sir, does this happen to you? You say to yourself, 'I'm not going there,' and yet you seem pulled by something. I'm asking because it happens to me."

Doctor: "I don't feel quite like that, but only the heart knows what is happening in the heart. (*To Sri Ramakrishna*) Besides, you shouldn't talk about things like this."

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1. Sashi (later Swami Ramakrishnananda) first saw Sri Ramakrishna in 1884.
2. The full moon day after the worship of Durga.

Section XXVIII

At the Shyampukur House with Narendra, Dr. Sarkar, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Dr. Sarkar and comparative religion

Thakur is sitting with Narendra, Mahimacharan, M., Dr. Sarkar, and other devotees in the second storey room of the Shyampukur house. It is one o'clock, 24 October 1885, 9th of Kartik.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Your homeopathic treatment is good."

Doctor: "We need to compare the symptoms of the patient with those mentioned in the book. It is like English music – you read and then you sing.

"Where is Girish Ghosh? Never mind. Don't bother him. He didn't sleep last night."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, when I'm in ecstasy, I feel inebriated, like I've taken hemp. Why is that?"

Doctor (*to M.*): "The action of the nervous system stops, so one is benumbed and staggers. All energy has gone to the brain. Life is nothing but the nervous system. The *medulla oblongata* is near the nape of the neck. If it is injured, life may be extinguished."

Mahimacharan Chakravarty talks about the kulakundalini power in the sushumna nerve. "The

sushumna nerve, which none can see, and being subtle, runs through the spinal cord. That's what Mahadeva says."

Doctor: "Mahadeva examined man in maturity. The Europeans have examined all stages, from the embryo to maturity. It's good to know comparative history. A study of the Santhal history has revealed that Kali was a Santhal woman. She was a great fighter. (*All laugh.*)

"Please don't laugh. Listen to what great good comparative anatomy has done. Earlier one could not distinguish between pancreatic fluid and bile. Then Claude Bernard examined the stomach, liver, and other parts of a rabbit and showed that bile had a different action from pancreatic fluid.

"It proves that we should examine lower animals as well. It will not do to examine man only.

"Similarly, a study of comparative religion is also highly beneficial.

"Why does what he (the Paramahamsa) says touch the heart so? He has examined all religions. He himself has practiced Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Shakta, and Vaishnava faiths. Bees gather honey from different kinds of flowers to make a beautiful hive."

M. (*to the Doctor*): "He (Mahima) has studied science a great deal."

Doctor (*smiling*): "Did you mean Max Müller's *Science of Religion*?"

Mahima (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "What help can doctors give you for your illness? When I heard that

you were sick, I said to myself that you were only boosting the pride of the doctors."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He is a very good doctor, and very learned."

Mahima: "Yes sir! He is a ship and we are only small boats made of a single tree-trunk."

The doctor folds his hands humbly.

Mahima: "But here (with Sri Ramakrishna) all are equal."

Thakur asks Narendra to sing.

Narendra sings:

I have made You the pole star of my life…

Next he sings:

Ever intoxicated with pride am I, and with the unending cravings of my heart….

And then:

O Lord! The creation of your universe is infinite and wonderful;

This whole world is a mansion of beauty…

Then he sings:

O Lord of the universe, seated on Your great throne,

You listen to the music of the universe, Your creation.

I, born of the dust of the earth, come to the portal of Your house with a feeble voice.

O Lord! I ask for nothing but Your vision.

I have come to sing to You in Your great hall,

where the sun and the moon praise you with hymns.

where from a far corner I too would sing Your praise.

And then:

O King of kings, reveal Yourself to me.

At Your feet I dedicate my soul and my life,

Seared by the fire of this world,

And a heart stained with wrongful acts.

O compassionate Lord, entangled in maya, I live as one who is dead.

Revive me by Your life-giving glance.

Finally he sings:

O my mind, be drunk with the wine of divine love;

Rolling on the ground, weep and chant the name of Hari...

Sri Ramakrishna: "And sing, 'You are all that exists.'"

Doctor: "Ah!"

The singing over, the doctor is almost spell-bound.

After a few minutes he folds his hands devotedly and says to Thakur, "May I take your leave now? I shall come again tomorrow."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Stay a little longer. I've sent for Girish Ghosh. (*Pointing to Mahima*) He is a scholar, but he dances when the name of Hari is chanted. There is no pride in him. He went to Konnagar just because we were there. Besides, he is independent. He's rich and doesn't have to work under anyone. (*Pointing to Narendra*) What do you think of him?"

Doctor: "A very good man!"

Sri Ramakrishna *(pointing to a devotee)*: "And him?"

Doctor: "Wonderful!"

Mahima: "If one has not read some Hindu philosophy, one cannot claim to know philosophy. Europeans don't know the twenty-four cosmic principles of the Samkhya philosophy. They cannot even grasp them."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What are the three paths that you talk about?"

Mahima: "The path of Sat, or existence, is the path of knowledge. The path of Chit is the path of yoga, the path of karma yoga, which includes the duties of the four stages of life. And the path of Ananda, or the way of bliss, is the path of love and devotion for God. You know all three paths and give information on all of them. (*Thakur laughs.*)

"What more can I say? Janaka is the teacher and Sukadeva the listener."

The doctor takes leave.

In samadhi after dusk – Nityagopal and Narendra – perfection through japa

The moon rises after dusk. Today is the second day of Kojagar Purnima, Saturday, 9th of Kartik. Thakur is standing, in samadhi. Nityagopal stands nearby devotedly.

When Thakur sits down, Nityagopal gently strokes his feet. Devendra, Kalipada, and many other devotees sit close to him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Devendra and others*): "It has come to my mind that these states of Nityagopal's will pass away and his whole mind will be concentrated on me – that is, on Him who dwells inside me.

"Don't you see how Narendra's whole mind is also becoming fixed on me?"

Many devotees are leaving. Thakur, standing, says to one of the devotees, "Japa is sitting quietly in solitude and repeating His name. Repeating His name with a concentrated mind – performing japa – one gets the vision of God's form and realizes Him. Think of a chain tied to a wooden log submerged in the Ganges, its other end fixed to the bank. Proceeding along each link of this chain, you enter the water and eventually reach the log. In the same way, by repeating God's name, you become absorbed in Him and realize Him."

Kalipada (*to the devotees, laughing*): "Our Thakur is wonderful! We don't have to practice austerities – japa or meditation."

Suddenly Thakur exclaims, "Something's not right!" His throat is troubling him.

Devendra says, "We aren't fooled by your words." His idea is that Thakur is only acting ill to fool the devotees.

The devotees leave. A few of the younger men have decided to stay for the night so they can nurse Thakur by turns. M. will also stay the night.

Section XXIX

The House in Shyampukur – Thakur with Narendra, Mani, and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Why the illness? Advice to Narendra about sannyasa

Thakur is sitting in the Shyampukur house with Narendra and other devotees. It is 10 o'clock, Tuesday, 27 October 1885, 12th of Kartik, the fourth day of the dark fortnight of Ashwin. The conversations on 26 October, 11th Kartik and discussions with Dr. Sarkar have been published in *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita,* Volume I.

Thakur is talking with Narendra and Mani.

Narendra: "How strange the doctor was behaving yesterday."

A devotee: "The fish was hooked, but the line broke."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "It was tied to the fishhook. The fish will die and come to the surface."

Narendra goes out for a while. He will return soon. Thakur talks to Mani about Purna.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I am telling this only to you. Ordinary men shouldn't hear these things. With a feminine attitude, a devotee naturally wants to embrace and kiss God."[1]

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1. Purusha.

Mani: "Many are His sports. Even your illness is a part of God's sport. It is because of your illness that new devotees are coming."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Bhupati says, 'Had you not contracted the disease, what would people have said if you had just rented this house?' Well, what about the doctor?"

Mani: "On the one hand, he accepts the attitude of a servant – 'I am the servant and You are my Master.' On the other, he asks, 'Why do you call a man God?'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "See for yourself. Are you going to see him today?"

Mani: "I'll go if I have to report news about you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What kind of boy is Bankim? If he can't come here, you yourself instruct him. His spiritual consciousness will be awakened."

What comes first: show of the world or God? – Sri Ramakrishna hints to Keshab and Narendra

Narendra comes in and sits down near Sri Ramakrishna. He is very worried since his father's death. He has his mother and brothers at home to provide for. He is preparing for his law examination and also has been working for a few months as a teacher at Vidyasagar's Bowbazar school. He will be at peace only after he has provided for the family. This is what he is trying to do.

Thakur knows all this. He gazes at Narendra affectionately.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Well, I said to Keshab, 'One should be satisfied with what comes of its own accord.[1] The son of a rich family has no worry about his food – he gets an allowance every month. Narendra belongs to a high plane, so why isn't he getting help? If you surrender your mind completely to God, He will surely provide for everything."

M.: "Sir, it will surely come about. It is not yet too late."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But when a person develops deep dispassion, all such calculations vanish. Feeling intense nonattachment, it just doesn't come to the mind, 'Let me first arrange everything for the family and then I will take to spiritual practices.' (*Smiling*) A goswami said in a lecture, 'If you have ten thousand rupees, it is enough for meals, and then you can sit down free of worries and call on God.'

"Keshab Sen also alluded to the same thing. He said, 'Sir, is it all right if a person settles his worldly affairs and then thinks of God? Is there any harm in that?'"

"I said, 'When a person attains deep dispassion, the world appears like a deep well and one's family like deadly snakes. That person doesn't calculate, saying, 'Let me save my money and arrange my worldly affairs.' God alone is the Reality and everything else is unreal. Thinking of the world, abandoning God!

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1. yadṛcchālābha, Gita 4:22.

"A woman suffered extreme grief. First she took her nose-ring and tied it to the end of her cloth. Then she fell on the ground and began to wail, 'Oh what a catastrophe has befallen me!' But she took great care that her nose-ring did not break." *(Everybody laughs.)*

Hearing these words, Narendra lies down on the floor as if hit by an arrow. M., though realizing his mental condition, says to him with a smile, "You are lying down. What is the matter?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M., laughing*): "It's like the woman who said, 'I'm sleeping with my husband's elder brother and feeling so ashamed. How do all these (women) sleep with strangers?'"

M., himself a householder, should be ashamed of it. No one sees his own faults but notices the faults of others. This is what Thakur is saying. A woman had an illicit affair with her husband's elder brother but thought that she was less at fault than other women who were mistresses of strangers. She would argue, "The husband's brother is, after all, one's own. Even so, I am dying of shame."

Who is liberal? – One is more attached to money earned by flattery and servility

A Vaishnava is singing downstairs, and Thakur is overjoyed to hear him. He asks the devotees to give him some money. A devotee goes to give him something. Thakur asks, "What did he give?" The devotee says, "Two pice."

Thakur: "That devotee earns money with great difficulty through servitude. It is hard-earned money, earned by flattery. I thought he would give at least four annas."

Electric machine and Bagchi – sees portrait of the six-armed Gauranga and Ramachandra – his earlier story: long haired sannyasin at Dakshineswar

The younger Naren had said he would bring a machine to demonstrate to Sri Ramakrishna the nature of electricity. He has done this today.

It is two o'clock. Thakur is sitting with the devotees. Atul has brought a friend, who is a subordinate judge, with him. Bagchi, the famous painter from Shikdarpara, has come. He presents several pictures to Thakur.

Thakur, full of joy, examines the paintings. When he sees the picture of Gauranga with six arms, he says to the devotees, "Look! How beautiful it is!"

Wanting to show the devotees more, he asks for the picture of Ahalya turned into stone. He is very happy to see Ramachandra in the picture.

Bagchi has long hair like a woman. Thakur says, "A long time ago I saw a sannyasin at Dakshineswar. He had hair nine cubits long. He used to chant, 'Radhe, 'Radhe.' It was not an act."

After a while, Narendra sings. All the songs are filled with dispassion. Is Narendra inspired by hearing Thakur speak of deep dispassion and sannyasa?

Narendra sings, first:

Will my days just pass in vain, O Lord?[1]

Day and night my eyes are on the path of hope…

1. For the complete song refer to Volume III, Appendix, Chapter I.

Then:

O Mother, as the Inner Controller! You are awake within, day and night.[1]

And finally:

O Lord, O Compassionate One! What joy have I in this life

If my soul, like a bee, does not remain inebriated at Your lotus feet?

1. For the complete song refer to Section XXI, Chapter III.

Section XXX

Sri Ramakrishna with Hariballav, Narendra, Mishra, and Other Devotees at Shyampukur House

Chapter I

Thakur's anxiety for Balaram – Hariballav Basu

Sri Ramakrishna is staying in the Shyampukur house with the devotees for treatment. Today is Saturday, 31 October 1885, 16th Kartik, the eighth day of the dark fortnight of Ashwin. The time is 9 o'clock.

The devotees are living here day and night to nurse Thakur. None of them has yet renounced the world.

Balaram and his family are serving Thakur. Balaram was born into a family of great devotees. His father, now old, lives alone in Vrindavan at Shyam Sunder Kunj, which he had built. His cousin Hariballav Basu[1] and other members of the family are all Vaishnavas.

Hariballav is the Chief Advocate at Cuttack. He did not approve of Balaram's visits to the Paramahamsa Deva, especially his taking the women of the family with him. Balaram had said to him, "Go see him once. Then you can say whatever you like."

Hariballav has come today. He salutes Thakur with great devotion.

Sri Ramakrishna: "How shall I get cured? Do you think that it's a serious illness?"

Hariballav: "Only the doctors can say, sir."

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1. His father's younger brother's son.

Sri Ramakrishna: "The women take the dust of my feet. Then I think that God dwells in this form. That's how I take it."

Hariballav: "You are a holy man. Everyone salutes you like that. What harm is there in that?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That would be true with Dhruva, Prahlada, Narada, Kapila, and saints like them. But what am I? Do come again."

Hariballav: "Sir, I will come because you attract me. You don't have to urge me."

About to leave, Hariballav salutes Sri Ramakrishna and advances to take the dust of his feet, but Thakur pulls his feet back. Hariballav does not give up but takes the dust of Thakur's feet anyway.

Hariballav rises. Thakur also stands up, to show him courtesy. He says, "Balaram is very sad [that I haven't gone to his house]. I thought that I should one day go to his house and meet you all. But I was afraid you'd say, 'Who brought him here?'"

Hariballav: "Why do you say that? Please don't worry about such things."

Hariballav leaves.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "He has love for God. Otherwise, why would he take the dust of my feet forcibly?

"I told you the other day that in divine ecstasy I saw the doctor and someone else. He is the other person. That's why he has come.'"

M.: "Yes, sir. He certainly has great devotion to God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How guileless he is!"

M. has gone to Sankharitola to give a report on Thakur's illness to Doctor Sarkar. The doctor is coming again today to examine Sri Ramakrishna.

The doctor talks about Thakur, Mahimacharan, and other devotees.

Doctor: "He (Mahimacharan) hasn't brought the book he promised to show me. He said he had forgotten to bring it. That's possible. I'm forgetful too."

M.: "He has read a great deal."

Doctor: "He is in such a plight in spite of it?"

Talking of Thakur, the doctor says, "What use is mere love and devotion for God if there is no knowledge?"

M.: "Why? Thakur says love for God comes after knowledge. But his meaning of knowledge and devotion is different from yours.

"When he says, 'Love and devotion follow knowledge,' he means the devotion that comes after attaining ultimate knowledge, Knowledge of Brahman – first knowledge of God, then love for Him. What you mean by knowledge is information acquired through the senses. Ultimate Knowledge is not verifiable by our standard; it can't be arrived at through knowledge acquired through the senses. The latter can be verified."

The doctor is silent. Then he talks about the incarnation of God.

Doctor: "What is this idea of the incarnation of God? And why should one take the dust of a man's feet?"

M.: "Why, you yourself say that you feel ecstatic seeing God's creation when you're doing scientific experiments. And also when you think of man. That being so, why shouldn't we bow before God? There is God in man.

"The Hindu religion says that God is present in all existence. You haven't studied this subject very much. Since God resides in all beings, what's wrong with saluting a man?

"The Paramahamsa Deva says, 'There is greater manifestation of God in some things than in others.' The sun is reflected in water and in a mirror. There is water everywhere, but more apparent in rivers or lakes. It is God whom one salutes, not man. God is God – not man is God.

"God can't be known by reasoning. It all depends on faith. All these are Thakur's words."

As a token of brotherly regard, the doctor today presents M. with one of the books he has written, *Physiological Basis of Psychology*.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and Jesus Christ – manifestation of Christ in Sri Ramakrishna

Thakur is sitting with devotees. It is eleven o'clock. He is talking with Misra, a Christian devotee. Misra is about thirty-five years old. He was born in a Christian family in northwestern

India. Though he is wearing European clothes, he wears ochre clothes under the Western dress. He has renounced the world. He was born in west India. Two of his brothers died on the day fixed for the marriage of one of them. Misra renounced the world that very day. He belongs to the Quaker sect.

Misra: "The same Rama dwells in all beings."

Sri Ramakrishna whispers to the younger Naren within Misra's hearing, "There is but one Rama, though he has a thousand names.

"He who is called God by the Christians is known by the Hindus as Rama, Krishna, Ishvara, and so forth. There are many drinking ghats at a reservoir. Hindus take water from one spot and call it 'jal,' or Ishvara. Christians take water from another spot and call it 'water,' that is to say God or Jesus. Muslims go to yet another spot and call it 'pani,' or Allah."

Misra: "Jesus was not the son of Mary, he was God Himself. (*To the devotees*) He (Sri Ramakrishna) appears this way now – at another time, he is God Himself.

"You (the devotees) don't recognize him. I saw him before in a vision. Now I see him in person. In my vision I saw him seated on a raised seat in a garden. Another person was sitting on the ground. He wasn't as spiritually advanced.

"There are four doorkeepers in this country. Tukaram in Bombay and Robert Michael in Kashmir. Here it is he [Sri Ramakrishna], and there's another person in the eastern region."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you see visions?"

Misra: "When I lived at home I used to see light. Then I had a vision of Jesus. How can I describe his beauty? What is the beauty of a woman in comparison with his!"

After a while, when talking to the devotees, Misra takes off his coat and trousers and shows his gerua loincloth.

Thakur comes in from the verandah and says, "It is not external. I saw him (Misra) standing in a heroic pose."

While he is saying this, Thakur goes into samadhi. He stands facing west.

Returning to the normal state somewhat, Thakur looks at Misra and laughs. Taking his [Misra's] hands, he laughs again. He says, "You will achieve what you are seeking."

It seems that Thakur is in the mood of Jesus. Are he and Jesus the same?

Misra (*with folded hands*): "I have surrendered to you my mind, heart, and soul since that day."

In an ecstatic mood, Thakur smiles.

He sits down. Misra tells the devotees about his earlier life. He tells how two of his brothers were killed when the canopy fell during the marriage.

Thakur asks the devotees to take care of Misra.

Thakur in the joy of devotional song, with Narendra, Doctor Sarkar, and others

Doctor Sarkar comes in. When he sees him, Thakur goes into samadhi. After the intensity of his ecstasy has decreased a little, Thakur says, "Sat-chit-ananda follows karanananda – He is the Karana of karana (the cause of the causal)."

Doctor: "Yes."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I have not become unconscious."

The doctor realizes that Thakur is full of God-consciousness. He says, "No! You are very conscious."

Thakur recites with a smile:

> I drink no ordinary wine, but the nectar of everlasting bliss, as I repeat "Jai Kali – to Kali, victory!"
>
> Seeing me drunk on this wine of the mind, by drunkards am I taken for a drunk.
>
> But my mind is drunk on drops of wine by knowledge[1] distilled from the molasses of the mantra, the guru's gift, and by the ferment of my own determination.
>
> Filled full with the Mother's nectar is the vessel of this body, which I purify by uttering Tara's name.
>
> Drink of this wine, says Prasad, and the four fruits of life shall be yours.[2]

Listening to the song, the doctor is almost overwhelmed with feeling. Thakur also becomes ecstatic and he puts his foot in the doctor's lap. A little later he comes out of ecstasy and pulls his foot

1. Jnana, knowledge of God.
2. Dharma (righteousness), artha (material comfort), kama (enjoyment), and moksha (liberation).

back. He says to the doctor, "Oh, what a nice thing you said the other day. You said, 'We are sitting in the lap of God. If we don't tell him about our illness, whom shall we tell? If we have to pray, we should pray to Him.'"

While saying this Thakur's eyes are filled with tears. He goes into an ecstatic mood again, and in that state he says to the doctor, "You are very pure. Otherwise, I could not have put my foot in your lap." And then he adds, "Only he is at peace who tastes the bliss of Rama."

"What is there in sense-enjoyment? What is there? And what is there in money, name, fame, and comforts of the body? If one has not known Rama, what has he known?"

The devotees are worried to see Thakur going into ecstasy during his serious illness. Thakur says, "I'll rest if someone sings that song, 'The wine of divine love.'"

Narendra is in another room. They ask him to come. He sings in his sweet voice, rare even among the gods:

O my mind, be drunk with the wine of divine love;

Rolling on the ground, weep and chant the name of Hari.

Fill the sky with the solemn roar of Hari's name.

Sri Ramakrishna: "And that song, too, 'On the sea of the bliss of consciousness.'"

Narendra sings:

The waves of ecstatic love for God rise on the sea of the bliss of consciousness.[1]

And then:

Meditate upon Hari, O my mind! He is the essence of consciousness. He is free from all impurity!

Without equal is His glory, beautiful is His shape, how very beloved is He in the hearts of His devotees!

Behold, His beauty is enhanced by fresh manifestations of love! It casts into shadow the effulgence of a million moons!

Verily, lightning flashes out of His glorious beauty! His blessed vision causes the hair to stand on end.

Worship His holy feet in the lotus of your heart. Gaze upon the matchless beauty of that Beloved Form.

Now that the mind enjoys peace and the eyes are filled with love, be immersed in divine love. Inspired with your devotion, remain merged in the joy of love.

The doctor listens to the song with rapt attention. When it is over, he says, "That was very good – 'on the sea of the bliss of consciousness.'"

Noticing how full of joy the doctor is, Thakur says, "A boy said to his father, 'Father, just taste a little wine. Then if you ask me to give it up, I will do so.' The father tasted it and said, 'Child, you may give it up, I have no objection – but I won't give it up.' (*The doctor and all others laugh.*)

"The other day the Divine Mother showed me two men. He was one of them. I saw that he would have immense knowledge – but dry knowledge. (*To the doctor, smiling*) But you will become succulent."

The doctor remains quiet.

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1. For the complete song refer to Section XVII, Chapter I.

Section XXXI

With Narendra and Other Devotees at the Cossipore Garden House

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna, an ocean of grace – M., Niranjan, and Bhavanath

Sri Ramakrishna is staying at a Cossipore garden house with his devotees. He is extremely ill, yet he has but one thought on his mind, the spiritual welfare of the devotees. He worries day and night for one or another of them.

He moved from the Shyampukur house to the Cossipore garden house on Friday, 11 December, the 27th of Agrahayana, the fifth day of the bright fortnight. He has been here for twelve days now. The young devotees have been gradually coming to stay in order to serve him. Many of them still visit their homes frequently. The householder devotees come almost daily, sometimes spending the night.

Most of the devotees, who have been gathering since 1881, have already met each other. The last have now come. Sashi and Sarat met Thakur at the end of 1884. After their college examinations in the middle of 1885, they began visiting him regularly. In September of 1884 Girish Ghosh saw Thakur at the Star Theatre. Three months after that, since the beginning of December, he has become a regular visitor. At the end of December 1884, Sarada saw Thakur at the Dakshineswar temple garden. Subodh and Kshirode met him for the first time in August of 1885.

All morning Sri Ramakrishna has been showering his love. He said to Niranjan, "You are my father. I will

sit on your lap." Touching Kalipada's chest, he said, "Be awakened!" Then stroking his chin with affection, he said, "Whoever has sincerely called on God or performed his daily religious duties will surely come here." He gave his blessings in the morning to two women, in the state of samadhi, touching their chests with his feet. They began to shed tears, one of them weeping, "Such grace!" His was a torrent of ecstatic love. As he wishes to bless Gopal of Sinthi, he said, "Fetch Gopal here."

Today is Wednesday, 23 December 1885, 9th of Pausha, the second day of the dark fortnight of Agrahayana. It is now evening. Thakur is meditating on the Mother of the Universe.

After a while he talks sweetly with one or two devotees. Kali, Chunilal, M., Navagopal, Sashi, Niranjan and other devotees are there in the room.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Buy a stool for me. How much will it cost?"

M.: "Between two and three rupees."

Sri Ramakrishna: "If a low seat for bathing costs twelve annas, why would a stool cost that much?"

M.: "It won't be too much. It might be less than that."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, tomorrow is Thursday and late in the afternoon is not auspicious. Can you come before three o'clock?"

M.: "Certainly, sir. I shall come then."

Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation of God? The hidden significance of his illness

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Well, how long will it take me to recover from this illness?"

M.: "It is rather serious. It will take time."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How many days?"

M.: "It may take five or six months."

Hearing this, Thakur becomes impatient, like a child, and says, "What are you saying?"

M.: "Sir, that long to get completely well."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Please tell me why I have such illness when I see so many divine visions and go into ecstasy and samadhi."

M.: "You are suffering a lot, sir. But it has a meaning."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What is that?"

M.: "Your mood will undergo a change. You are becoming inclined toward the Formless. Even the 'I of knowledge' is disappearing."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, my teaching to others is coming to an end. I am not able to speak any more. I see everything is Rama. Time and again I ask myself, whom shall I tell? Just see, this house has been rented with the result that so many different devotees are coming here. But there is no signboard announcing the lecture times, like Krishnaprasanna Sen's or Shashadhar's." (*Both Thakur and M. laugh.*)

M.: "And there is another meaning, to sift the devotees. What cannot be achieved by practicing austerities for five years, the devotees are gaining during these few days – spiritual disciplines, ecstatic love, devotion."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, undoubtedly. Niranjan has just been home. (*To Niranjan*) Tell me, how do you feel?"

Niranjan: "I did love you earlier, but now I simply cannot stay away."

M.: "One day I realized how great all these men are."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Where?"

M.: "Sir, I noticed this one day when I was standing by myself in the Shyampukur house. I realized how each one of them has come here to serve you, brushing aside so many obstacles."

Thakur in samadhi – in wondrous state – vision of the formless – selection of intimate disciples

Hearing this, Thakur becomes absorbed in ecstasy. After some time, he remains absolutely still, in samadhi.

When his ecstasy is over, he says to M., "I saw that all forms of God were merging into the Formless. I want to say much more, but I can't. Well, this inclination to the Formless – is it because the body will cease to exist? Do you think so?"

M. (*speechless*): "That could be, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I see even now the Formless Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute – just like that. But I have concealed the inclination with great effort.

"What you say about sifting of devotees is right. This illness is showing who belongs to the inner circle and who belongs to the outer. Those who

come here after renouncing the world belong to the intimate group. And those who just come once and ask, 'How do you do, sir?' belong to the outer circle.

"Did you notice Bhavanath? He came to Shyampukur dressed as a bridegroom and asked me how I was doing. He never came again. I treat him kindly because of Narendra, but my mind is no longer attracted to him."

Chapter II

Speaking freely the story of his life in his own words – who is Sri Ramakrishna?

āhus tvām ṛṣayaḥ sarve devarṣir nāradas tathā ।

asito devalo vyāsaḥ svayaṁ caiva bravīṣi me ।।

[Thus do all the seers acclaim You – the divine seer Narada, also Asita Devala and Vyasa – and now you yourself tell me so.]

– Bhagavad Gita: 10:13

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "When God descends, assuming a human form for the sake of His devotee, he is accompanied by devotees as well. Some are his intimate disciples, others belong to the outer circle, and some are suppliers of provisions.

"When I was ten or eleven years old, I was going to the Vishalakshi shrine in my native village and had my first experience of ecstasy in an open field. What did I see? It made me completely lose all external consciousness.

"When I was twenty-two or twenty-three, I was asked by the Divine Mother in the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, 'Do you want to be Akshara?' I didn't know the meaning of *Akshara* and I asked Haladhari. He said, '*Kshara* means an embodied being and *Akshara* means the Paramatman, or the Supreme Self.'

"At the time of arati, I would climb up to the roof of the Kuthi and cry out from there, 'Come, O devotees! Wherever you may be!' I would stop breathing when I met worldly people. I told English-educated men and they said, 'All this is delusion of the mind.' I became peaceful, thinking to myself, That may be so. But all this is being confirmed now. All the devotees are gathering.

"Then the five providers were revealed to me. First I saw Mathur Babu and then Sambhu Mallick – I had never seen him before, but I had seen in ecstasy a fair-complexioned man wearing a crown. When I met Sambhu many days later, I remembered that it was this very man I had seen in ecstasy. The other three providers I have not yet been able to spot clearly. But they were all fair-skinned. Surendra might very well be one of the providers.

"When this state came over me, a person identical to me came and shook the spiritual nerve channels – the ida, the pingala, the sushumna. He licked the lotus of each of the six chakras and all the drooping lotuses turned up. Last of all, the lotus at the sahasrara opened out completely.

"I was shown beforehand what kind of person would visit me. I saw with these physical eyes, not in a vision, a kirtan party led by Chaitanya Deva, going from the banyan tree to the bakultala. I saw Balaram in it and, I think, yourself [M.]. The regular visits of Chuni and yourself to me have awakened spiritual consciousness [in both of you]. I also saw Sashi and Sarat. They were in the group of the rishi Christ.

"I saw a boy under the banyan tree. Hriday said that a son would be born to me. For me every woman is the Mother. How could I have a son? That boy is Rakhal.

"I said, 'Mother, since you have given me this temperament, please find me a rich man.' So it was that Mathur Babu served me for fourteen years. He did so much! A separate provision store for sadhus, carriages and palanquins for me – whatever I asked him to give to anyone, he gave. The Brahmani (Bhairavi Brahmani) used to say, 'He is Pratap Rudra.'[1]

"Vijay had a vision of this very form (of Sri Ramakrishna). What does this mean? He said he touched it just as I touch you.

"Noto (Latu) counted thirty-one devotees. This is not a big number. Kedar and Vijay are making a few more.

"I was shown in a vision that during my last days, I would have to live on farina pudding.

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1. A king of Orissa and a devotee of Chaitanya Deva, whom he served with immense faith, respect, and devotion.

"During this illness, my wife (Holy Mother) is feeding me farina pudding. I weep, saying, 'Is this the living on farina pudding? In this painful condition?'"

Section XXXII

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra and Other Devotees at the Cossipore Garden House

Chapter I

Advice to Narendra on the harmony of Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga

Sri Ramakrishna is with the devotees in the big hall at the Cossipore garden house. It is about 8 p.m. Narendra, Sashi, M., the elder Gopal, and Sarat are there. Today is Thursday, 11 March 1886, 28th of Phalgun, 1292 (B.Y.), the sixth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Phalgun.

Thakur is ill. He is resting in bed with the devotees sitting near him. Sarat is standing and fanning him. Thakur talks of his illness.

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you go to Bholanath, he will give you some oil and tell you how to use it."

The elder Gopal: "Then we'll bring it tomorrow morning."

M.: "Somebody can go and get it today."

Sashi: "I can do it."

Sri Ramakrishna (*pointing at Sarat*): "He can go."

In a little while Sarat leaves for Dakshineswar temple to get the oil from Bholanath Mukherji.[1]

Thakur is lying down. The devotees sit silently. Suddenly he sits up and addresses Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "Brahman is unattached. The three gunas are in Him, but He is not attached to them.

"It is like a breeze carrying the fragrance of both good and bad smells. The air remains unaffected. Shankaracharya was walking along a road in Kashi. An outcaste carrying a load of meat was coming his way and suddenly touched him. Shankara exclaimed, 'You've touched me!' The outcaste said, 'Master, you have not touched me, nor have I touched you. The Atman is not attached. You are that pure Atman.'

"Brahman and maya! A man of knowledge rejects maya.

"Maya is like a veil. See, I am using this towel in front of the lamp to bar the view, and I can't see the light of the lamp."

Thakur holds the towel between himself and the devotees. He says, "Look. Now you can't see my face.

"As Ramprasad says, 'Raise the mosquito net and see.'

"But a devotee doesn't reject maya. He worships Mahamaya. Taking refuge in it, he prays, 'Mother, don't stand in the way. Only when you step out of

1. A clerk at the Dakshineswar temple garden.

the way will I attain the knowledge of Brahman.' A man of knowledge denies the three states of wakefulness, dream, and deep sleep. But devotees accept them all. As long as 'I-ness' persists, so long does everything else exist.

"As long as you retain 'I-ness', so long do you see that God indeed has become maya, the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles."

Narendra and the others remain silent.

"The theory of maya[1] is dry. Now tell me, what I said."

Narendra: "Maya is dry."

Thakur strokes Narendra's face and hands and says, "All these are the signs of a devotee. The features of a man of knowledge are different: his face and body are dry."

"But a man of knowledge can live in the world with vidyamaya – love for God, compassion, and non-attachment[2] – after attaining spiritual knowledge. This is for two particular objectives. First, to teach mankind and second, to enjoy bliss.

"If a jnani remains silently in samadhi, he would not be able to instruct people. That's why Shankaracharya retained the 'ego of knowledge.'

"And a man of knowledge lives with devotees and love for God to enjoy and experience the bliss of God.

---

1. The Vedantic theory that the world of names and forms is illusory, dream-like.
2. Bhakti, daya, and vairagya.

"There is no harm in the 'I of knowledge,' the 'I of a devotee.' But the 'rascal I' is harmful. When one realizes God, one becomes childlike. There is no harm in the 'I of a child.' It's like a face reflected in a mirror. It doesn't say bad things. A burnt rope is a rope only in appearance – it is blown away with a puff. The 'I' gets burnt in the fire of spiritual knowledge. Then it can no longer harm anyone. It is 'I' only in name.

"Living in the relative world after reaching the Absolute is like going to the other bank and then returning. It is for teaching people and for enjoyment, for pleasure."

Thakur talks in a very low voice. He pauses for a while and then he says to the devotees, "I am so sick, but my mind is not subject to the power of ignorance.[1] Just look, I don't think of Ramlal or home or wife. But I am worried about Purna, a kayastha boy unrelated to me. I have no worry about the others.

"It is God who has kept vidyamaya in me for the benefit of others – for the devotees.

"And as long as one keeps vidyamaya, one has to return. Divine incarnations and other god-men keep vidyamaya. You have to come back even if you have the least trace of desire – you have to return repeatedly. A person gains liberation only when all desires are gone. But devotees don't want liberation.

---

1. Avidyamaya.

"If you die in Kashi, you don't have to return. Men of knowledge want liberation."

Narendra: "The other day we went to Mahimacharan Chakravarty's house."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "And then?"

Narendra: "I have never seen a jnani as dry as he is."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What happened?"

Narendra: "He asked us to sing. Gangadhar[1] sang:

> By Krishna's name restored to life, Radha looks round and round, searching, searching….
>
> Then catching sight of the black tamal tree, Radha exclaims, "Behold! There is my Krishna's crest!"

"Hearing the song, he [Mahima] said, 'Why sing such songs? I don't like love, or things like that. Besides, I have a wife and son. Why sing such songs here?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "See his fear!"

1. Later Swami Akhandananda.

Section XXXIII

Sri Ramakrishna at Cossipore Garden House with Narendra and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Modesty is the ornament of women – his earlier story – gracious visit to M.'s house

Sri Ramakrishna is staying at the Cossipore garden house with the devotees. Although very ill, he is constantly anxious about the welfare of the devotees. Today is Saturday, 17 April 1886, 5th of Vaishakh, fourteenth day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra. It is also a full moon day.

Narendra has been visiting Dakshineswar almost daily to meditate in the panchavati for several days. Today he returns to Cossipore in the evening, accompanied by Tarak and Kali.

It is 8 p.m. The moonlight and southern breeze have made the garden very beautiful. Many of the devotees are meditating in the room downstairs. Narendra says to Mani, "They are giving it up" (i.e. giving up their personal adjuncts as they meditate).

In a little while Mani goes to the hall upstairs and sits with Thakur, who asks him to bring a spittoon and hand towel after cleaning them. Mani goes to the bathing ghat of the western pond and washes them in the moonlight. Then he brings them back.

The next morning Thakur sends someone for Mani. He had gone to the roof of the hall after taking his bath in the Ganges and meeting Thakur.

Mani's wife has gone almost insane with grief over the death of her son. Thakur asks for her to be brought to the garden for her meals. He indicates by a sign, "Ask her to come and stay here for two days. She should bring her baby and have her meals here."

Mani: "As you request, sir. It would be good for her to develop great love for God."

Sri Ramakrishna says by a sign, "Grief drives away (love of God). And he [the boy] was quite grown up.

"Krishnakishore had two sons almost Bhavanath's age. Each of them had two university degrees. They died. Krishnakishore is such a jnani, but he could not keep his balance in the beginning. Luckily, God has not given me a son.

"Such a great jnani Arjuna was! And he had Krishna as his companion. Even so, his grief was inconsolable at Abhimanyu's death.

"Why hasn't Kishori come?"

Devotee: "He goes every day to bathe in the Ganges."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why doesn't he come here?"

Devotee: "I'll ask him to."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Latu*): "Why doesn't Harish come?"

Modesty is an ornament of women – his earlier story – gracious visit to M.'s house

Two girls nine or ten years old, from M.'s family, have come to the Cossipore garden house and sung these songs for Thakur: 'O my tongue, always repeat the name of Durga,' 'The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight,' and others. When Thakur visited M.'s house at Telipara in Shyampukur (Thursday, 30 October 1884, 15th of Kartik, onset of the eleventh day of the lunar month), the same two girls sang for him then. He had been very pleased to hear them. When they sang today at the Cossipore garden house, the devotees heard them from downstairs and called them down to hear their songs again.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Don't teach your girls songs anymore. It is different if they sing on their own, but a woman's modesty suffers if she sings in the presence of anybody and everybody. It is very important that women preserve their modesty."

Sri Ramakrishna's self-worship – he gives prasad to the devotees

Flowers and sandal paste are brought to Thakur in a flower bowl. Sitting on his bed, he begins to worship himself, touching the flowers with sandal paste to his forehead, throat, and heart, and sometimes to his navel.

Manomohan has come from Konnagar. After saluting Thakur, he sits down. Thakur, still worshiping himself, places a garland around his own neck.

After a while, as if pleased with him, Thakur gives some offered flowers to Manomohan and a champak flower to Mani.

Chapter II

Did Buddha believe in the existence of God? Instruction to Narendra

It is 9 o'clock. Thakur is talking to M. Sashi is also in the room.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "What did Narendra and Sashi talk about? What did they discuss?"

M. (*to Sashi*): "What were you talking about?"

Sashi: "Maybe Niranjan told you about it. Did he?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "God does not exist, God does exist. Is that what you were talking about?"

Sashi (*smiling*): "Shall I call Narendra?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, do call him." (Narendra comes in and sits down.)

(*To M.*) "Please ask him something. (*To Narendra*) Tell me what you were talking about."

Narendra: "My stomach is upset. What more can I say?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It will be all right."

M. (*smiling*): "What is the state of Buddha [illumination] like?"

Narendra: "Did I ever attain it that I could tell you?"

M.: "What is Buddha's opinion about whether or not God exists?"

Narendra: "How can you say that God exists? It is you who have created the world. You do know what Berkeley[1] says."

M.: "Yes, indeed he does say about external objects, '*Esse est percipi* (the existence of external objects depends upon their being perceived).'"

His earlier story – Totapuri's instructions to Thakur: 'the world is only the projection of the mind'

Sri Ramakrishna: "The Naked One used to say, 'The world is the product of the mind, then it dissolves itself back into the mind.'

"But as long as 'I-ness' persists, the attitude of master and servant is the right attitude."

Narendra (*to M.*): "How can you prove by reasoning that God exists? But if you rely on faith, you have to accept the attitude of master and servant. And if you accept that – and accept you must – you have to accept that He is kind as well.

"You only think of your sorrow. What about the happiness He has bestowed? Why do you forget it? How great is His grace! He has given us three precious things: human birth, longing for God, and the company of a great spiritual personality – manushyatam, mumukshutvam, mahapurusha-sanshrya."

They all sit silently.

---

1 George Berkeley (1685-1753), Irish philosopher.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "But I do definitely feel that there is someone within."

Dr. Rajendra Lal Dutta arrives and takes a seat. He is treating Thakur with homeopathic medicine. When the conversation about medicine ends, Thakur points to Manomohan.

Dr. Rajendra: "He is a son of my maternal uncle's son."

Narendra comes down to the lower floor and begins to sing to himself:

> By giving Your vision, You have rid me of all sorrows and charmed my soul.
>
> Beholding You, all the seven worlds forget their grief,
>
> What to speak of my poor self so mean and unworthy.

Narendra has been suffering from mild indigestion. He says to M., "Feelings of love and devotion for God make the mind tend toward the body. Were it otherwise, who would 'I' be? Then there would be no man and no god, and I would have neither sorrow nor happiness."

Thakur's worship of himself – his prasad to Surendra – Surendra's service to Thakur

It is already 9 p.m. Surendra and other devotees have brought a garland of flowers and offered it to Thakur. Baburam, Surendra, Latu, M., and some others are in the room.

Thakur puts the garland brought by Surendra, around his own neck. Everyone sits silently. Thakur is worshiping Him who resides within.

Suddenly he motions to Surendra. When he comes near the bed, Thakur puts the offered garland around Surendra's neck.

Surendra salutes after receiving the garland. Thakur asks him by a sign to stroke his feet gently. Surendra strokes Thakur's feet for some time.

Thakur in devotional singing with devotees in Cossipore garden house

There is a reservoir to the west of the room Thakur occupies. A few devotees are singing on the platform of its ghat with the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. Thakur sends word through Latu, "Please chant the Lord's name for a while."

M. and Baburam are still sitting with Thakur. They listen to the music of the devotees:

My Gaur is dancing,

Dancing with the devotees to the kirtan in Srivas's courtyard.[1]

Listening to the song, Thakur signals to Baburam, M., and the others, by a sign, "Please go downstairs. Sing with them and dance."

They go down and take part in the kirtan.

After a while Thakur sends someone to ask them to sing:

O friend! My Gaur even knows how to dance!

His divine mood I cannot describe,

As my Gaur dances with both hands upraised!

1. For the complete song refer to Section XV, Chapter V.

The kirtan ends. Surendra, in an ecstatic mood, sings:

My father[1] is mad, my mother too,

And I, their son, am mad.

My Mother is none other than Shyama,

And my father, He who utters "ba-ba-bam!"[2]

Drunk with wine, my Mother staggers, Her disheveled hair away.

While bees beyond number swarm around Her crimson feet,

Buzzing to the ring of her anklets' bells.

Chapter III

Existence of God and Narendra – Bhavanath, Purna, and Surendra

After visiting Sri Ramakrishna, Hirananda gets into a carriage. Standing close by, Narendra and Rakhal exchange a few words with him. It is 10 o'clock. Hirananda will come again tomorrow. This has been narrated in *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, Volume II, Section XXVII.

Today is Wednesday, 21 April, 1886, 9th day of Vaisakha, the 3rd day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra. Narendra and M. converse while they stroll the garden path. Narendra's mother and brothers are in great difficulty at home. He has not yet been able to make satisfactory arrangement for their well-being and is very worried.

---

1. Shiva.
2. The hollow, drumming sound that Shiva makes while striking his cheeks.

Narendra: "I don't want to work in Vidyasagar's school anymore. I'm thinking of going to Gaya. Somebody told me there's a manager's job for someone's estate there. There is no God – or anything like God."

Mani (*smiling*): "You say this now, but later you won't. Skepticism is a stage on the path to God-realization. When you've passed this stage and progressed further, you will realize God. That's what the paramahamsa says."

Narendra: "Has anyone seen God the way I see these trees?"

Mani: "Yes, Thakur has."

Narendra: "That may be a hallucination."

Mani: "What a person sees in a particular state is reality for him – the truth – in that state. If you dream you are in a garden, that garden is a reality for you. However, in another state, say when you are awake, you may know that it was unreal, an illusion. When you attain the state of God-realization, you see Him as the Reality, the truth."

Narendra: "I want the truth. The other day I had a long argument with the paramahamsa."

Mani (*smiling*): "What was it about?"

Narendra: "He said to me, 'Some people call me God.' I said, 'Let a thousand people say so, but I won't unless I realize it myself.'

"He said, 'What many people say is the truth, that is the law.'

"I said, 'Unless I realize it for myself, I will not listen to what others say.'"

Mani (*smiling*): "You have the same attitude as Copernicus[1] and Berkeley. Everybody said that it was the sun that revolves [around the earth]. Copernicus didn't listen. The man in the street says that the external world is a reality. Berkeley refused to believe it. That is why Lewis said, 'Why was Berkeley not a philosophical Copernicus?'"

Narendra: "Can you give me a book on the history of philosophy?"

M.: "The one by Lewis?"

Narendra: "No, by Überweg.[2] I want to study a German author."

Mani: "You say, 'Has anyone seen God the way I see this tree?' Suppose God came as a human being and said, 'I am God,' will you believe him? Don't you know the story of Lazarus? When he died and was in the other world, Lazarus said to Abraham, 'Let me go tell my relatives and friends that there really is another world and a hell.' Abraham said, 'Will they believe you if you say that? They'll say that some charlatan has come and is telling stories.' Thakur says, 'God can't be known by reasoning. Everything comes from faith: jnana, vijnana, vision, intimacy – everything.'"

Bhavanath has married. He is worried about making a living. He comes to M. and says, "I hear

1. Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), Polish astronomer and founder of modern astronomy.
2. Friedrich Überweg, *An Outline of a History of Philosophy from Thales to the Present,* 3 vols., 1867.

Vidyasagar is going to establish a new school. I need to earn a living. Can I get a job there?"

Ramlal – carriage fare for Purna – Surendra's straw screens

It is between three and four o'clock. Thakur is resting. Ramlal, who has come from Dakshineswar to see him, is gently stroking his feet. Gopal of Sinthi and Mani are also in the room.

Thakur asks Mani to shut the window and massage his feet.

Purna had been asked to hire a carriage and come to the Cossipore garden house. He has already visited Thakur and left. Mani will pay the carriage fare. Thakur asks Gopal by a sign, "Has he (M.) given the money?"

Gopal: "Yes sir."

It is about 9 p.m. Surendra, Ram, and others are planning to return to Calcutta.

It is a hot day in the month of Vaishakh. Thakur's room becomes extremely hot during the day, so Surendra has brought straw screens. Hung on the windows they will cool the room to a great extent.

Surendra: "Where are the screens? Why, they haven't been hung! Nobody pays any attention."

A devotee (*smiling*): "The devotees are now in the state of brahmajnana. It is now 'I am He';[1] the world is an illusion. When the feeling of 'You are

1. So 'ham.

the Lord and I am your servant' returns, they will attend to his service." (*All laugh.*)

APPENDIX A

BARANAGORE MATH

Shivaratri fast by Narendra, Rakhal, and other brothers of the monastery

Baranagore Math. Narendra, Rakhal, and other devotees have observed a fast today for Shivaratri. Two days later they will celebrate the anniversary of Thakur's birth.

Baranagore Math was founded only five months ago, not long after Thakur Sri Ramakrishna had gone to his eternal abode. Narendra, Rakhal, and other devotees are in a state of deep renunciation. One day, when Rakhal's father came to persuade him to return home, Rakhal said to him, "Why do you take the trouble of coming here? I'm alright here. Just bless me that you may all forget me and I may forget you." They are all in a state of deep dispassion, ever engaged in spiritual practices and singing the name of God. They have only one ideal, – to realize God.

Narendra and the other devotees sometimes practice japa and at other times study the scriptures. Narendra says, "Work without expectation of any reward, which the Lord talks about in the Gita, is what we are to do – worship, japa, meditation, and such. We are not to do activities of any other kind."

Narendra had gone to Calcutta in the morning, to appear in court in connection with his family's lawsuit. He had to testify in court personally.

M. reaches the monastery at 9 o'clock. Seeing him enter the "demons' room,"[1] Tarak begins to sing a song in praise of Shiva:

Tathaiya tathaiya dances Shiva …

Rakhal also joins him and both begin to dance as they sing the song that Narendra had recently composed:

Tathaiya tathaiya dances Shiva to the sound of *ba-ba-bam! ba-ba-bam!*[2]

Dimi-dimi-dimi rings His damaru,[3] while around his neck sways a garland of skulls.

And through his matted locks the Ganges roars and his scintillating trident flashes fire – *dhak-dhak-dhak!*

His hair, tied in a bun atop his head – how splendidly the moon glows upon it!

All the brothers in the monastery are fasting. Narendra, Rakhal, Niranjan, Sarat, Sashi, Kali, Baburam, Tarak, Harish, Gopal of Sinthi, Sarada, and M. are present. Jogen and Latu are in Vrindavan these days; they have not seen the monastery yet.

Today is Monday, 21 February 1887. Sarat, Kali, Niranjan, and Sarada are planning to go to Puri next Saturday to visit Lord Jagannath. Sashi is engaged in serving Thakur day and night.

The worship over, Sarat begins to sing to the accompaniment of a tanpura.

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1. "The monastic brothers were nicknamed "demons." The "demons' room" was a room in the house that they used as a parlour."
2. A reference to the hollow, drumming sound that Shiva makes while striking his cheeks.
3. A small, handheld drum, shaped like an hourglass.

The Lord of Kailas, the King of Kings, Shiva Shankara dances – *ba-ba-bam!*

The beat of his damaru rumbles over Kailas's peak, a garland of serpents encircles his neck, and his bloodshot eyes shine brightly,

Even as the crescent moon, adorning his forehead, shines brightly too.

Narendra has just returned from Calcutta and has not yet taken his bath. Kali asks him, "What is the news about the lawsuit?"

Narendra (*irritated*): "Why are you concerned about it?"

Narendra is smoking and talking to M. and others: "You cannot succeed without renouncing 'lust and greed.' 'Woman is the door to hell.' All men are under the control of women. Shiva and Krishna are different. Shiva made Shakti his maidservant. Sri Krishna did live a householder's life, but how unattached he was! How quickly he gave up Vrindavan!"

Rakhal: "And also how he left Dwaraka."

Narendra returns to the monastery after a dip in the Ganges, holding his wet dhoti and a towel in his hand. Sarada, his whole body covered in dust, comes and prostrates before Narendra. He has also observed the fast of Shivaratri and is now going to the Ganges to bathe. Narendra goes to the shrine room, salutes Thakur, and then sits and meditates for quite a long time.

They are now talking about Bhavanath, who has married and taken a job. Narendra, says, "Oh, he and people like him are but worldly worms!"

It is midday. Arrangements for the worship of Shivaratri are being made. Wood and vilwa leaves of the bel tree have been gathered for the homa fire that will be performed after the puja.

Evening arrives. Having waved incense in Thakur's shrine, Sashi takes the incense stick to the other rooms as well and bows to the picture of each god and goddess, chanting their names with utmost devotion. "I bow to the guru; I bow to Kalika; I bow to Jagannath, Subhadra, and Balaram; I bow to the six-armed one; I bow to Radha Vallabha; I bow to Nityananda, Advaita, and the devotees; I bow to Gopala and I bow to Yashoda; I bow to Rama, Lakshmana, and Vishwamitra."

Arrangements have been made for the worship of Shiva under the bel tree of the monastery. It is 9 o'clock [in the evening]. The first worship will be performed now. The second worship will be at half past eleven. There will be four worships in the four watches of the night. Narendra, Rakhal, Sarat, Kali, Gopal from Sinthi, and the other brothers of the monastery are present under the bel tree. Bhupati and M. are also there. A brother of the monastery is performing the worship.

Kali reads from the Gita sections on the review of the armies, Samkhya Yoga, and Karma Yoga. During the reading he discusses them with Narendra.

Kali: "I myself am everything. I create, preserve, and destroy."

Narendra: "How can I create? There is a power which makes me do it. All actions – even thinking – are caused by God."

M. (*to himself*): "Thakur said, 'As long as you are aware that you are in meditation, you are in the jurisdiction of Primal Power. You have to accept the fact of Primal Power.'"

Kali thinks for some time silently. Then he says, "The action you are talking about is all illusion. There is not even such a thing as thinking. I laugh when I think of these things."

Narendra: "The 'I' that is understood when we say 'I am He' (So 'ham) is not this ego. It is what remains after getting rid of the mind and body and so on."

After reading of the Gita, Kali chants, "Peace, peace, peace (Santih, santih, santih)."

Narendra and the other devotees all stand up and circumambulate the vilwa[1] tree repeatedly as they dance and sing. Now and then they chant in chorus, "Shiva Guru! Shiva Guru!" It is a deep dark night. The fourteenth day of the dark fortnight – darkness all around. All living creatures are still.

"Shiva Guru, Shiva Guru," chanted from the lips of these young, ochre-clothed, unmarried devotees, is full of dispassion. The sound of the great mantra merges with the Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, having risen like rain clouds rumbling through the infinite sky.

1.The vilwa tree is also called the bel tree.

It is almost dawn when the worship ends. Narendra and the devotees bathe in the Ganges during this sacred time of early dawn, the Brahmamuhurta.

It is day break. After their dip in the Ganges, the devotees go to the shrine of the monastery and salute Sri Ramakrishna. Then they assemble in the "demons' room" (the parlour). Narendra has put on a beautiful new ochre cloth. The indescribably pure, celestial radiance of his face and body, the result of spiritual austerities, blend with the color of his apparel. His countenance is filled with vigour and also intense love for God. It looks as if a drop from the ocean of Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda has assumed a divine body in order to teach mankind knowledge and love for God – as a helper in the work of a divine incarnation. None can turn his eyes away from Narendra, who is now twenty-four years old – exactly Sri Chaitanya's age when he renounced the world.

The day before, Balaram had sent fruits and sweets from his house for the devotees to break their fast the next day.

Standing in the room, Narendra, Rakhal, and a couple of other devotees have some refreshments. After eating one or two, they say joyfully, "Blessed Balaram! Blessed you are!" (*They all laugh.*)

Now Narendra makes fun like a child. Putting a rasagolla in his mouth, he stands absolutely still, his eyes unblinking. Seeing Narendra in this state, a devotee pretends to hold him from behind lest he fall.

After some time, Narendra (with the rasagolla still in his mouth) opens his eyes and says, "I … am … well …" (*Everyone laughs loudly.*)

M. and the others are served the offered sweets and hemp.

M. watches this mart of joy. The devotees shout together, "Victory to Guru Maharaj, Victory to Guru Maharaj!"

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Section I

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna dances with devotees in the joy of ecstatic love at Balaram's house

It is about 8 or 9 p.m., seven days after the Dolayatra. Thakur is surrounded by Ram, Manomohan, Rakhal, Nityagopal and other devotees. They are all inebriated with chanting the name of God. Some of the devotees are in a state of ecstasy. In such a state, Nityagopal's chest has turned red. When they all sit down, M. salutes Thakur. He sees that Rakhal is lying down overwhelmed with ecstasy and unaware of the outside world. Thakur, putting his hand on Rakhal's chest, says, "Peace, peace." It is the second time Rakhal has experienced ecstasy. He lives with his father in Calcutta and goes to Dakshineswar from time to time to visit Thakur. At the present time he is a student in Vidyasagar's school in Shyampukur.

Thakur had said to M. in Dakshineswar, "I will visit Balaram's house in Calcutta. Please go there." That is why M. has come to see him.

It is Saturday, 11 March 1882, 28th of Falgun, the seventh day of the dark fortnight of Chaitra. Thakur has come to Balaram's house at his invitation.

The devotees sit for prasad on the verandah while Balaram stands humbly to serve them. He doesn't act like the master of the house.

M. has only recently begun to visit Sri Ramakrishna. He has not yet talked to the devotees, only with Narendra at Dakshineswar.

Harmony of religions

A few days later, Sri Ramakrishna had been sitting absorbed on the steps of the Shiva temples. It was about four or five o'clock. M. was seated near him.

A short while ago, Thakur had rested on his bedspread on the floor in his room. Nobody was yet living there to attend to his needs and he has been greatly inconvenienced since Hriday's departure. When M. came from Calcutta to see him, he talked to him while he walked to the Shiva temples. Sitting on a step of the Shiva temple opposite the temple of Sri Radhakanta, Thakur suddenly went into ecstasy at the sight of the temple.

He begins to talk to the Mother of the Universe. He says, "Mother, everybody says his watch gives the correct time. Christians, Brahmos, Hindus, Muslims, all of them say, 'Only our religion is true.' But Mother, nobody's watch is right. Who can really know You? But if someone calls on You with a longing heart, You can be reached, by Your grace, by any path. Mother, how do Christians call on You in church? Please show me once. But Mother, what will people say if I enter a Church? Maybe it will result in a hullabaloo; maybe I won't be allowed to enter the Kali temple again. So please let me see from the door of the church."

Thakur enjoys devotional music with devotees – love of Rakhal – 'the wine of divine love'

On another day [in March 1882] Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot in his room. He is a picture of joy with a smiling face. M. comes in with Kalikrishna.[1]

Kalikrishna did not know where he was being taken by his friend. The friend [M.] had only said to him, "Come with me if you want to go to a grog shop. There's a huge pitcher of wine there." When they reached Thakur and M. had saluted him, he told Thakur everything he had said to his friend. Thakur laughs.

He says, "The bliss of devotional music and the bliss of Brahman are wine indeed – the wine of love for God. The aim of life is to develop intense love of God. Indeed, love for God is the essence. It is extremely difficult to know God through knowledge and reasoning." Saying this, Thakur begins to sing:

> Who can know what Kali is? Even the six philosophies cannot reveal Her.
>
> The yogi meditates on Her from the Muladhara to the Sahasrara,
>
> As She sports with Kala – two swans amid a wilderness of lotuses.
>
> Like Om, the source of all, Kali is the inner self of the yogi who delights in the Self.
>
> She dwells in every living creature, of Her own will and just as She pleases.

1. Kalikrishna later became the main professor of Sanskrit and history at Vidyasagar's College.

Kala, eternity – he alone knows the meaning of Kali, time; who else but he can know Her as She truly is?

The universe and all living beings rest in the Mother's womb, and you presume to know Her vastness?

Says Prasad, to think that you can know Her is as laughable as trying to swim across the sea.

My mind understands, but alas my heart does not! Though but a dwarf, it aspires to catch the moon.

Sri Ramakrishna says again, "The aim of life is to love God – the way the cowherd boys and milkmaids of Vrindavan loved Sri Krishna. When Sri Krishna went to Mathura, the cowherd boys wandered around weeping in sorrow at being separated from him."

Saying this, Thakur gazes upward and sings:

I have just seen a new cowherd boy. He holds the branch of a young tree and in his arms he holds a new-born calf.

Says he, where is brother Kanai?

But he only mutters 'K' – unable to utter the complete word, Kanai.

And his eyes are filled with tears.

Hearing this song full of love from Thakur, M.'s eyes become filled with tears.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna at a devotee's house – at Prankrishna's home

Today Sri Ramakrishna has come to Calcutta. He is sitting with devotees in the parlour on the first floor of Prankrishna Mukherji's Shyampukur house, having just eaten a meal with the devotees. It is Sunday, 2 April 1882, the 14th day of the bright fortnight of

Chaitra, the time between 1 and 2 in the afternoon. Captain lives in the same neighborhood and Thakur wants to go to his house after resting at Prankrishna's. Then he wants to visit Keshab Sen in his house called the Lily Cottage., Prankrishna is sitting in his parlour. Ram, Manomohan, Kedar, Surendra, Girindra (Surendra's brother), Rakhal, Balaram, M. and other devotees are present.

Some gentlemen of the neighborhood and other invited guests are also there. They are all anxious to hear what Thakur has to say.

Thakur: "God and His glory. This world is certainly His glory. But seeing His splendour and glory, people forget everything else. They don't look for Him who is the master of all these riches. Everybody wants to enjoy 'lust and gold' – but there are more problems than enjoyment. The world is like a whirlpool of Vishalakshi. Once a boat is caught in it, nothing can save it. Or it's like a thorny bush. You pull yourself out of one thorn and get entangled with another. Once you enter a labyrinth, it's difficult to find the way out of it. A man becomes scorched in the world of lust and gold."

A Devotee: "So what's the way out?"

The way: holy company and prayer

Sri Ramakrishna: "There is a way: holy company and prayer.

"Unless you go to a doctor, you can't be cured. One day of holy company is not enough. It is always necessary, because the disease is chronic. Without going to a doctor, you don't know how to diagnose

the problem. You have to be with the doctor, here there and everywhere. Only then can you understand if it is phlegm or bile."

The Devotee: "How is holy company useful?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Association with the holy develops fondness for God, it generates love for Him. Unless you can develop yearning for God, you won't achieve anything. By keeping the company of holy people, the heart becomes restless for God. It's like feeling constantly worried when somebody at home is ill, worrying how the patient can be cured. This yearning should be like a person out of work who is running around from one office to another in the search of a job. If he's told there's no vacancy in the office, he goes again the next day to ask if one has occurred.

"There is another way: praying with a sincere heart. He is your own. You have to say to Him, 'Please reveal yourself to me, grant me Your vision. Why have you given birth to me?' Sikh devotees said to me that God is kind. I said to them, 'Why should I call Him kind? He has created us. What wonder is there that He is kind to us?' What kindness is there in parents' bringing up their children? He has to do it, so we should make demands on Him. He is our own father, our own mother. If the son wants his inheritance and begins to fast for it, his parents release it three years early. Again, when a boy entreats his mother for money, 'Mother, I fall at your feet. Please give me money,' the mother has to comply with his wishes. Seeing his insistence, she tosses a few coins at him.

"There is another benefit of holy company: only the thought of what is Real comes to mind – what is Real, what is eternal, that is, God. What is unreal is transitory: the mind should discriminate. No sooner does an elephant raise its trunk to eat the plantain tree of a stranger but the mahout goads it."

A Neighbour: "Sir, why is there sin?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are all kinds of people in this world. He has created good people and He has also created the wicked. It is He who gives good as well as bad tendencies."

Responsibility of a sinner and results of actions

The Neighbour: "So a sinner isn't responsible for his sins."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's God's law that you have to bear the consequence of sin. Won't chili be hot if you eat it? Mathur Babu did a lot of bad things in his youth. That's why he suffered from a number of diseases before he died. You don't notice early on. There's a lot of wood fuel for cooking in the Kali temple. The wet wood burns nicely in the beginning and you don't notice water in it. But when the wood is burnt, all the water collects and it puts out the fire in the oven. That's why you should beware of lust, anger, greed and so on. Just see how Hanuman burnt Lanka in anger. Later, he realized that Sita was in the Ashoka grove. Then he was frantic that she might come to harm."

The Neighbour: "Why did God create wicked people?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is His will, His sport. Both knowledge and ignorance[1] are in His maya. Darkness is necessary to show the glory of light. If lust, anger and greed are bad, why has he made them? Because he wants to create saintly people. A person becomes high-minded when his senses are subdued. What is impossible for a person who has overcome his senses? By His grace, he can even realize God. And look at it from this point of view. It's through desire that His creation continues.

"Wicked people are needed too. When the tenants of a landlord rebelled the landlord sent Golok Choudhury. He was so cruel that the tenants trembled at his name. Everything is necessary. Sita said, 'Rama, if there were only palatial buildings in Ayodhya, it would be so nice, but I see so many old shanties.' Rama replied, 'Sita, if all the houses were well built, what would the masons do?' (*All laugh.*) God has created everything – good trees, poisonous trees, even weeds. Among animals also, there are good and bad – tigers, lions, snakes, all these and more."

It is possible to realize God even in household life – everybody will attain liberation

The Neighbour: "Sir, is it possible to attain God while living a householder's life?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Certainly you can. But, as I said earlier, you have to keep the company of holy people and constantly pray to Him. You have to weep before Him. When the mind is washed of all impurities, God is seen. The mind is like a needle

1. Vidya and avidya.

covered with mud – God is a magnet. Until all the dirt is cleaned off, it cannot join the magnet. When you weep, all the dirt of the needle is washed off. The dirt of the needle is lust, anger, greed, bad tendencies and worldly calculation. As soon as the dirt is washed off, the magnet will pull the needle to itself. In other words, you will have the vision of God. When the mind is purified, a person attains God. Say a person has a fever – a lot of poison in the body is causing the illness – how can quinine help in such a condition?

"Why isn't it possible to realize Him while living as a householder? The same thing – keep the company of the holy, weep and pray to Him, and live in solitude now and then. If plants on a roadside aren't fenced, cows and goats will eat them up."

The Neighbour: "So people who lead a householder's life can also realize God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Everybody will attain liberation. However, a person should follow the instructions of his religious preceptor. If you take a crooked path, it will be difficult to return. Then liberation will take a long time. It's possible that you won't attain it in this life, it may take more births. Janaka and others lived and worked as householders – they worked, keeping God on their minds – the same way a dancing girl dances with a pot on her head. And think of the western (Indian) women. They walk along talking and laughing while they're carrying water pots on their heads."

The Neighbour: "You said that you should follow the instructions of the religious teacher. But how can we find a religious teacher?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Not just any kind of person can be a guru. A big log[1] floats and can carry a number of birds and animals on it. But if someone climbs on a light piece of wood, it not only sinks, but drowns whoever is on it. That's why God incarnates in every age as a guru. Sat-chit-ananda himself is the guru.

"What is knowledge and who am I? God alone is the doer and everything else is only an instrument – this is called jnana, or spiritual knowledge. I am not a doer, I am only an instrument in His hands. That's why I say to the Divine Mother: Mother, You are the operator, I am an instrument; You are the resident, I am the house; You are the driver, I am the carriage. I move at Your will; I do what You make me do. I speak only as You make me speak. Not I, not I, only You, only You."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab Sen at the Lily Cottage

From Captain's home, Thakur goes to Keshab Sen's house, the Lily Cottage. Many devotees are with him, including Ram, Manomohan, Surendra, and M. They are all seated in the hall on the second story. Pratap Majumdar, Trailokya and other devotees are also present.

Thakur has great affection for Keshab Sen. It was when Keshab was practicing spiritual disciplines with

1. Bahaduri.

his disciples in Belgharia – in 1875 after the festival of Magha – Thakur went to the garden to meet him. He was accompanied by Hriday, his nephew. It was in this Belgharia garden that Thakur said to Keshab, "You have cast off your tail. In other words, after renouncing everything you are able to live inside or outside the household – like a tadpole that's lost its tail and can live both in water and on land." He advised Keshab on many occasions later at Dakshineswar, the Lily Cottage, Brahmo Samaj and other places: God can be realized by different paths and by different religions. A person can live in the world after practicing spiritual disciplines in solitude and developing love for God. Janaka and others lived a worldly life after attaining the knowledge of Brahman. You must call on Him with a heart full of yearning, only then will He grant His vision. Worship God without form; this is very good. Attaining the knowledge of Brahman, you will have the correct understanding that God is real and all else is transitory. Brahman is real, the world unreal. The Eternal Religion[1] believes both in God with form and God without form; God is worshipped with different attitudes – the attitude of peacefulness, as servant, as friend, as parent, and as one's beloved. During a symphony of sanai and other instruments[2] a musician plays one single note though he has seven holes in his pipe – while at the same time there is another musician who also has seven holes in his flute but plays different notes.

"You don't believe in God with form. There is no harm in that. It's enough to have single-minded devotion to the formless God. Even so, you should cultivate the longing that the believers in God with form have. When you call upon Him as Mother, your love and devotion increase. At one time you may have the attitude of a servant, at another of a friend, then of a

1. Sanatana Dharma.
2. Roshan Chowki.

parent, again as one's beloved. I have no desire, I only love Him. It's a nice attitude. It's called motiveless devotion.[1] I have asked for nothing – not money, not fame, nor respect. All I ask for is love and devotion to Your lotus feet. The Vedas, the Puranas and the Tantras talk of only one God and of His sport. This attitude contains both spiritual knowledge and love of God. You should live in the world like a maidservant. A maid attends to all the household work, but her mind is tied to her native village. She brings up the children of her master. She even addresses them as 'My Hari', 'My Rama,' but she knows they're not hers. It's necessary to practice spiritual disciplines in solitude. You will receive His grace. How many spiritual disciplines King Janaka practiced! It is only by practicing spiritual disciplines that a person can live unattached in the world.

"You deliver lectures for the good of all. But good ensues to others only if you have realized God, have had His vision. Without His command, advice has no effect. And unless you've realized God, you don't receive His command. The signs of God-realization are that the person becomes like a child, like an inanimate object, like a crazy person, a demon – like Sukadeva and others. Chaitanya Deva used to dance, sometimes like a child, at other times like a madman – he would laugh, then weep, then dance and then sing. While living in holy Puri, he remained in *jada samadhi* (like an inanimate object) for a long time."

Keshab gradually develops reverence for Hinduism

Sri Ramakrishna instructed Keshab Sen during casual conversations in different places. Keshab Sen mentioned meeting him in Belgharia for the first time

1. Ahetuki bhakti.

in the Sunday edition of the *Indian Mirror*, 28 March, 1875.[1]

The Magha festival again fell in January in 1876. The title of Keshab Sen's lecture in the Town hall was: "Brahmo Religion and What We Have learnt From it (Our Faith and Experiences)." In the discourse, he mentioned a great deal about the beauty of the Hindu Religion.[2]

If Sri Ramakrishna loved Keshab Sen, the latter showed love and devotion to him no less. Almost every year during the Brahmo festival and on other occasions Keshab would go to Dakshineswar to bring him to the Lily Cottage. Sometimes he would take him alone, as one of his very own, with great love and devotion to the worship room on the first floor. He would worship God in seclusion there.

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1. We met Paramahamsa of Dakshineswar not long ago and were charmed by the depth, penetration and simplicity of his spirit. The never ceasing metaphors and analogies in which he indulged are most of them as apt as they are beautiful. The characteristics of his mind are very opposite to those of Pandit Dayananda Saraswati, the former being too gentle, tender and contemplative, as the latter is sturdy, masculine and polemical.
– *Indian Mirror*, 28th March, 1875

Hinduism must have in it a deep source of beauty, truth and goodness to inspire such men as these.
– Sunday Mirror, 28th March, 1875

2. If the ancient Vedic Aryan is gratefully honoured today for having taught us the deep truth of the Nirakar, or the bodiless Spirit, the same homage is due to the later Puranic Hindu for having taught us religious feelings in all their breadth and depth.

In the days of the Vedas and the Vedanta, India was all Communion (Yoga). In the days of the Puranas, India was all emotion (Bhakti). The highest and best feelings of religion have been cultivated under the guardianship of specific divinities.
– "Our Faith and Experiences", Lectures delivered in January, 1876

Keshab invited and brought him to the Bhadra festival in 1879 and again in the *tapovan* of Belgharia. Again, he brought him to the festival at the Lily Cottage on 21st September. It was on this day that he was photographed with the Brahmo devotees while in samadhi. In this photograph Thakur is standing in samadhi, held by Hriday. On 22nd October, the 6th day of Kartik, the festival of Mahalakshmi, on the 9th day of the lunar month, Keshab went to see him in Dakshineswar.

On 29 October, 1879, Wednesday, 13th day of Kartik, 1286 (B.Y.), at one in the afternoon on the day of Kojagar Purnima, Keshab went again with some devotees to Dakshineswar to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Along with his steamer, there were a barge, six boats and two small boats with about eighty devotees. They carried their pennant, flowers and leaves, and musical instruments such as khol, kartal and berry. Hriday welcomed Keshab and brought him from the steamer singing, "Who is chanting the name of Hari on the bank of the Ganges? It seems to be Nitai who is coming, inebriated with ecstatic love." The Brahmo devotees also accompanied them, singing kirtan from the Panchavati: "The image of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, beauty and bliss in body." Thakur goes into samadhi every now and then in their midst. On this day Keshab carried out the divine service after twilight in the light of the full moon on the Bandhaghat.

After the service Thakur had said, "Please say, 'Brahman-Atman-Bhagavan. Brahman-maya-jiva-jagat. Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan.' (Brahman, Atman and Bhagavan are one. Brahman, His maya, the world and the embodied beings are all He. God, His devotee and his word are one)."

The Brahmo devotees and Keshab repeated these mantras with Sri Ramakrishna in the moonlight on the bank of the Ganges, their hearts full of love for

God. And when Sri Ramakrishna said, "Now repeat Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava (the Guru, Krishna and the worshipper are one and the same)," Keshab smiled and said, "Sir, not that far yet. If we say, Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava, people will call us too orthodox." Sri Ramakrishna also laughed and said, "Yes indeed, you people should only go as far as you can."

Some days later after the worship of Kali, on 13 November 1879 on 28th Kartik, Ram, Manomohan and Gopal Mitra met Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar for the first time.

One summer day in 1880 Ram and Manomohan came to the Lily Cottage to see Keshab. They were very interested to know what Keshab thought of Sri Ramakrishna. They said that when asked, Keshab told them, "The Paramahamsa of Dakshineswar is no ordinary man. There is no one as great as he on earth. He is so beautiful, so extraordinary, he must be preserved with the greatest care. If this is not done he will not survive – he must be preserved the way a beautiful and valuable article is kept in a glass case.[1]"

A few days later, during the festival of Magha, in January, 1881, Keshab Sen went to see Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. Ram, Manomohan, Jaygopal Sen and many others were there.

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1. Sri Ramakrishna came a second time to the Baelghar garden on 14 May, 1875, the first of Jaishtha. The Bharata Ashram libel suit ended on 30 April, 1875, 14th day of Vaishakha, 1282 (B.Y). Keshab was still there in this garden. Sri Ramakrishna had been in Kamarpukur for four months in 1880 – from Wednesday, 3 March, 21st day of Falgun to 10 October, 1880, 25th of Ashwin. During these days, they enjoyed kirtan while reading the holy books. In Seohar Shyambazar while returning, he witnessed the arati of the puja of the 7th day in the homes of the gentlemen of Koutulpur. On the way, he met some Brahmo devotees sent by Keshab. Keshab was worried as he had not seen Thakur for several months.

On Friday, 15 July 1881, the first day of Shravana, 1288 (B.Y.), 1803 Shaka Samvat, Keshab again took Sri Ramakrishna on a steamer from Dakshineswar.

In 1881, when Thakur visited Manomohan and they celebrated the occasion, Keshab was also invited. He took part in the festivity. Trailokya and others sang.

Sri Ramakrishna went by invitation to the house of Rajendra Mitra in December, 1881. Keshab was also there. This house is situated on Becchu Chatterji Street in Thanthania. Rajendra, Ram and Manomohan's uncle were also there. Ram, Manomohan, the Brahmo devotee Raja Mohan and Rajendra sent word to Keshab and invited him.

When Keshab received the message, he was mourning the death of his brother Aghornath. Brother Aghor, the preacher, breathed his last in Lucknow on Thursday, 8 December, the 24th day of Agrahayana. Everybody thought that Keshab would not be able to make it. However, when he received the message, Keshab said, "How is it possible? The Paramahamsa is coming and I shall not be able to see him! I will certainly go. Since I am in mourning I will sit separately for my meal."

The mother of Manomohan, Shyamsundari Devi, a great devotee, had served the meal for Thakur. Ram was there. The day Sri Ramakrishna graced Rajendra's house with this visit, Surendra took him to the Chinna Bazaar in the afternoon and had him photographed. Thakur was standing in samadhi.

On the day of this festival, Mahendra Goswami read out from the Bhagavata.

The festival was celebrated in the Shimulia Brahmo Samaj on the day of Maghotsava in January, 1882. The service and kirtan were performed in the open space and courtyard of Jnana Chaudhury's house. Both Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab had been invited.

It was here that Thakur heard Narendra sing for the first time and asked him to visit Dakshineswar.

On Thursday, 23 February, 1882, 12th day of Falgun, Keshab, accompanied by his devotees, visited Sri Ramakrishna again at Dakshineswar. Miss Pigot and Joseph Cook, the American clergyman, were with them. Keshab took Sri Ramakrishna for a cruise with the Brahmo devotees. Mr. Cook saw Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi. Nagendra was also in the boat. Hearing about Thakur from him, M. met Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar for the first time within the next three days.

Two months later, in April, Sri Ramakrishna went to see Keshab at the Lily Cottage. A short account of this visit has been given in this section.

Sri Ramakrishna's affection for Keshab; he vows to offer a green coconut and sugar to the Mother of the Universe

Today Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in the parlour of the Lily Cottage with the devotees – Sunday, 2 April 1882, 21st Chaitra, 1288 (B.Y.), 5 p.m. A message is sent to Keshab who is in an inside room. He dresses himself in a shirt and cloth and comes to salute Sri Ramakrishna. He was going to see his friend, Kalinath Basu, who was ill. But he cannot go since Sri Ramakrishna has arrived. Thakur says, "You're a very busy man. Besides, you have to write for a newspaper. You don't have time to come to Dakshineswar, so I've come here to see you. Because of your illness I vowed to offer green coconut and sugar to the Divine Mother. I said, 'Mother, if anything happens to Keshab, whom shall I talk to in Calcutta?'"

Sri Ramakrishna has a long conversation with Pratap and other Brahmo devotees. Noticing M. sitting close by, he [Thakur] says to Keshab, "Why doesn't he come to Dakshineswar? Ask him, my dear. He's said many times that his mind is not attached to his wife and children." It has only been a month and a few days that M. has started to visit Sri Ramakrishna. For the last few days, he has not done so. That's why Thakur is saying this. Thakur had told him that if his visit was delayed, he should write him a letter.

Introducing Samadhyayi, the Brahmo devotees say to Thakur, "He is a learned man, well-versed in the Vedas and other holy books." Thakur says, "Yes, I can see inside him by looking through his eyes, just as the inside of a room is visible through a glass door."

Trailokya sings. Evening lamps are lighted while he sings. The singing continues. Listening to the song, Thakur suddenly stands up and, chanting the name of the Divine Mother, goes into samadhi.

Returning somewhat to normal consciousness, he begins to dance and sing to himself:

> I drink no ordinary wine, but the nectar of everlasting bliss, as I repeat "Jai Kali – to Kali, victory!"
>
> Seeing me drunk on this wine of the mind, by drunkards am I taken for a drunk.
>
> But my mind is drunk on drops of wine by knowledge[1] distilled from the molasses of the mantra, the guru's gift, and by the ferment of my own determination.

1. Jnana, knowledge of God.

Filled full with the Mother's nectar is the vessel of this body, which I purify by uttering Tara's name.

Drink of this wine, says Prasad, and the four fruits of life shall be yours.[1]

Thakur looks at Keshab with eyes full of affection, as if he is his very own, fearing that he may lose him; in other words, he might become entangled in worldly life. He looks at him and sings:

Afraid am I to speak the word to you; equally afraid am I not to speak it.

The fear that arises in my mind is that I may lose you, yes, be robbed of you, my wealth, my treasure!

Knowing well your mind, we shall teach you the *mantra* (holy name) that is to bring you to the Beloved.

Now ready yourself to receive that *mantra* which enabled us on many occasions to steer the ship safely to land.

"'Knowing well your mind, we shall teach you the *mantra* (holy name) that is to bring you to the Beloved.' In other words, call on God, renouncing all else. Only God is Real, all else is ephemeral. If you haven't attained Him, nothing has been achieved. This is the great secret."

Thakur sits down again and talks to the devotees.

They prepare to serve him refreshments. A Brahmo devotee is playing the piano on one side of the hall. Sri Ramakrishna smiles and goes to stand near the piano. Like a child, he looks at it. After

1. Dharma (righteousness), artha (material comfort), kama (enjoyment), and moksha (liberation).

awhile, he is taken to the inner apartments for refreshments. The ladies will salute him there.

After refreshments he boards a carriage. All the Brahmo devotees stand near the carriage. It leaves Lily Cottage for the Dakshineswar Temple.

Section II

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Kedar's festival at Dakshineswar

Sri Ramakrishna is talking to Kedar and other devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple. It is Sunday, 13 August 1882, Amavasya, 29th day of Shravana, 1289 (B.Y.), the time about five o'clock.

Kedar Chatterji's home is in Halishahar. He is an accountant in government service. For a long time he had been in Dhaka where Vijay Goswami used to talk endlessly about Sri Ramakrishna. Hearing about God, his eyes would become filled with tears. He used to be a member of the Brahmo Samaj.

Thakur is sitting with devotees on the southern verandah of his room. Ram, Manomohan, Surendra, Rakhal, Bhavanath, M. and many other devotees are present. Kedar is celebrating a festival. The whole day passes in joy. During the singing by a master singer whom Ram has brought, Thakur goes into samadhi. He is sitting on the smaller cot in his room. M. and other devotees are sitting at his feet.

The nature of samadhi and harmony of religions: Hindus, Muslims and Christians

When he speaks, Thakur explains the nature of samadhi. He says, "You attain samadhi when you have realized Sat-chit-ananda. Then all duty drops off. What is the use of talking about Him in that state? How long does a bee hum? Till it sits on a

flower. But giving up duties is not for an aspirant. He must practice worship, the chanting of His name, meditation, various devotions and pilgrimages.

"If a person reasons after realizing God, it's like a bee buzzing softly while it sips honey."

The musician sings beautifully. Sri Ramakrishna is delighted to hear him. He says to the musician, "A person who has a great talent, such as music, has a special manifestation of the power of God."

Musician: "Sir, how can a person realize God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Love for God[1] is what is essential. God resides in everything, so whom do I call a devotee? The person whose mind ever dwells on God. This doesn't happen if one is egoistic and proud. The water of God's grace does not collect on the hill of 'I-ness'; it runs off. I am only an instrument.

(*To Kedar and the other devotees*) "You can reach God by treading any path, all religions are true. You have to climb up onto the roof with the help of something. You can go by brick steps, by wooden steps, and you can also do it with the help of a bamboo ladder or a rope. You can even climb with the help of a bamboo pole.

"If you say that there are shortcomings and wrong conduct in their religion, I say, let it be. There are flaws in all religions. Everybody thinks his watch gives the correct time. But it is yearning

1. Bhakti.

that is essential. It is enough if you yearn for Him; love for God and attraction to Him makes for success. He is the inner controller.[1] He sees the inner attraction, the yearning of the mind. Think of a father of many boys. Some of the older ones call him baba or papa very clearly. The younger ones can only utter ba or pa. Does the father get angry with the young ones? The father knows they're calling him even though they can't pronounce his name properly. All children are equal in the eye of a father.

"And also, devotees call God by different names. But they're calling the same person. A pond has four ghats. When Hindus take water from one, they call it 'jal'; Muslims take water from another and call it 'pani'; Englishmen take it from yet another ghat and call it 'water'. And there are others who call it 'aqua'. But God is one, though his names are different."

Chapter II

At a circus – Sri Ramakrishna and difficult problems of people in the world

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at the door of Vidyasagar's school in Shyampukur in a hired hackney carriage. It is about three o'clock. He has taken M. with him, as well as Rakhal and one or two other devotees. Today is 15 November 1882, 30th of Kartik, the 5th day of the bright fortnight. The carriage gradually proceeds towards the Maidan of the fort via Chitpur Road.

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1. Antaryamin.

Sri Ramakrishna is filled with joy. As though intoxicated or like a child, he leans out this side of the carriage, then the other. He talks to the devotees about the pedestrians. He says to M., "Look, I see that these people are interested in earthly things. They're intent on their stomachs – they don't think about God."

Today Sri Ramakrishna is going to the Maidan to see the Wilson Circus. When they arrive, they buy the cheapest tickets of the lowest class, totaling eight annas. The devotees take him to a high gallery and sit on a bench. Thakur says happily, "Very nice. You can see well from here." He watches different feats in the circus ring for a long time. Then he sees a horse running around the ring with an Englishwoman standing on one foot on its back. There are big iron hoops suspended over the track and when the horse nears them, it runs under them and the lady jumps through them, landing on the horse's back again and balancing on one foot. The horse runs swiftly around the circular track again with the lady standing on its back as before.

The circus show is over. Thakur comes down from the gallery and goes with the devotees to the Maidan near the carriage. It is chilly. He is wearing a green cloth and talks to the devotees there in the maidan. One of the devotees has a small pouch of spices in his hand. The main spice is cubeb.

First practice spiritual life, then lead family life – yoga of practice

Sri Ramakrishna says to M, "See how the Englishwoman stands on one foot on the horse's back while it gallops around the ring. How difficult

it is. She's practiced it for a long time – that's how she can do it. A little carelessness on her part and she could break an arm or leg. She could even die. Family life is just as difficult. Very few people can lead it successfully, and then only by the grace of God and after having practiced spiritual disciplines. Most people can't do it. Domestic life brings much bondage. It drowns a person and makes him suffer deathlike pangs. A very few, like Janaka, were able to live in the family after practicing for a long time. Practicing spiritual disciplines is truly necessary. Without it, a person can't live rightly in the world."

Sri Ramakrishna in Balaram's house

Sri Ramakrishna gets into the carriage. It reaches the door of Balaram's house in Bosepara, Baghbazar. Thakur goes with the devotees to the parlour on the first floor. Evening lamps have been lit. Thakur talks about the circus. A number of devotees have assembled and Thakur talks about many spiritual things with them. He talks only about God.

Sri Ramakrishna, the caste system and problem of untouchables solved

Now the conversation turns to discrimination about castes. Thakur says, "There is a way to extinguish caste difference. That way is bhakti, or love for God. A devotee knows no caste. Love for God cleanses the body, the mind and soul. Gaur and Nitai spread the name of Hari and embraced all, including the pariah. A brahmin is no brahmin without love for God, and a pariah is no longer a

pariah when he has love for God. An untouchable becomes pure, sanctified, by love for God."

A worldly man is a bound soul

Sri Ramakrishna talks about worldly men: "They are like silkworms. They can come out of their cocoons if they want to, but they've made them with such effort they can't give them up. So they die there. Or they're like fish in a trap[1] which can come out through the hole they have entered but, enjoying the sweet sound of water and swimming about with other fish, they get lost and don't even try to come out. The lisping of children is the sweet sound of the water. The other fish are other people and the family. Only one or two swim out. They are called liberated souls."

Thakur sings:

What charm Mahamaya has exercised
that even Brahma and Vishnu remain in the dark,
what to speak of a human being!
The bamboo ghurni trap is laid,
fish enter into them.
There is a way to exit,
but the fish do not escape.

Thakur continues: "Individual souls are like lentils fallen between millstones. They will be ground to powder. Only a few grains stick to the peg and are not crushed. So you have to take refuge next to the peg, with God. You have to call on Him,

1. Ghurrni: A bamboo trap with big holes allowing fish to come in with the flow of water.

chant His name. That alone will bring you liberation. Otherwise, you will be ground in the millstone of death.[1]"

Thakur sings again:

Mother, having fallen into the ocean of the world, this boat of the body is sinking.

O Shankari, the tempest of delusion and the storm of attachment are gradually rising.

The helmsman of the mind is incompetent, its six boatmen[2] are stupid.

Having fallen into a whirlpool, I am struggling, shouting, "I sink, I sink!"

The oar of devotion is broken, the sail of faith torn, so, my boat is out of control.

What can I do? No remedy do I see.

Feeling helpless I fight the waves, I try to catch the boat of Durga's name.

Duty to wife and children

Vishwas Babu had been sitting in the room for a long time. He gets up now and leaves. He had been wealthy, but squandered it all in a depraved life. Now he doesn't even take care of his wife, daughter and family. When Balaram talked to Thakur about him, he said, "He is a spendthrift. A householder has duties and debts – to gods, to the father, to rishis, and also to the members of the family. A chaste wife must be provided for. And also children till they are grown and can stand on their own feet."

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1. Kala.
2. Probably a reference to the six passions: lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride, and envy.

"Only a sadhu doesn't have to save for the future. Birds and monks don't save. But birds bring food in their beaks for their chicks."

Balaram: "Now Vishwas wants to keep the company of holy men."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing*): "The Kamandalu of a sadhu moves around to all four holy centres of pilgrimage,[1] but it remains just as bitter as before. The malaya breeze turns every tree that it touches into sandalwood. But the cotton, the ashwattha and the hog-plum do not become sandalwood trees. Some people keep the company of sadhus to be able to smoke hemp. (*Laughter.)* Don't the sadhus smoke hemp? So others sit with them to prepare the hemp and get some as prasad." (*All laugh.*)

Chapter III

Visit to the six-armed image of Chaitanya and to Rajmohan's house – Narendra

Sri Ramakrishna has come to Calcutta on the day following his visit to the circus at Fort Maidan. It is Thursday, 16 November 1882, the sixth day of the bright fortnight of Kartik, the first of Agrahayana. Reaching Calcutta, he first goes to visit the image of Chaitanya with six arms at Granhatta.[2] It is a centre for Vaishnava sadhus, Giridhari Das its chief priest. The six-armed Mahaprabhu has been worshipped here for some time. Thakur visits at dusk.

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1. Dham.
2. Now known as Neemtala Street.

Some time after dusk, Thakur goes by hackney carriage to Rajmohan's house in Shimulia. He has been told that Narendra and other young men perform the Brahmo Samaj service here. That is why he has come. M and one or two other devotees are with him. Rajmohan is an old Brahmo member.

Brahmo devotee and complete renunciation or sannyasa

Thakur is happy to see Narendra and says, "I'll watch how you worship." Narendra begins to sing. Priya and some other young men were present.

Worship now begins. One of the young men performs it. He prays, "Lord, grant that we may renounce everything else and become absorbed in You." It seems he has been inspired by seeing Sri Ramakrishna and so is talking of complete renunciation. M. is seated very close to Thakur and is the only one to hear him say in a very soft whisper, "Not much likelihood of that![1]"

Rajmohan takes the master inside the house to serve him some refreshments.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna in the houses of Manomohan and Surendra

Sri Jagadhatri Puja will fall on next Sunday, 19 November 1882. Surendra has invited Thakur to his home today. He impatiently goes in and out of the house waiting for Thakur to come. Seeing M.,

1. He is probably referring to Narendra.

he says, "You have come. But where is he?" Just then Thakur arrives by carriage.

Manomohan's house is quite close. Thakur has first gone there to rest awhile before going to Surendra's house. In Manomohan's parlour, he said, "God likes the devotion of a person who is humble and poor. Like a cow loves fodder mixed with oil-cake. Duryodhana showed his wealth and splendour, but the Lord didn't go to his house. He went to Vidura's. He is the gracious loving Lord of his devotee. He runs after a devotee the way a cow runs behind after her calf."

Thakur sings:

The ecstasy for which the exalted yogi practices yoga,

like a magnet attracting iron does the Lord pull.

"Tears used to flow from Chaitanya's eyes when he heard the name of Krishna. Only God is substantial, all else is illusory. The man, if he so wishes, can realize God. But he remains addicted to the enjoyment of 'lust and greed.' Though a snake has a jewel on its head, it is happy to eat a frog.

"Love for God is the essential thing. Who can know God through reasoning? I want love of God. Why do I need to know His boundless glories? If I can become inebriated by only one bottle of wine, why do I need to know how much wine is in the wine shop? A pot of water is enough to quench my thirst. Why do I need to know how much water is on the earth?"

Surendra and judge Sadarwala – caste distinction. Caste system and problem of untouchables solved – Theosophy

Sri Ramakrishna now arrives at Surendra's house. He goes in and sits in the parlour on the first floor. The brother of Surendra, Sadarwala, is also present. Many devotees have gathered together in the room. Thakur says to Surendra's brother, "You are a judge, that's good. But please remember that it is God's power through which everything happens. You have this high post because it is He who has granted it. People think they are great. But it is water on the roof that flows down the drain pipe which ends in the shape of a lion's mouth – it looks like the water's coming out of a lion's mouth. But see where the water is coming from. In the sky is a cloud that rains down on the roof. Then the water flows down the drain pipe and comes out through the lion's mouth."

Surendra's brother: "Sir, they talk of freedom of women in the Brahmo Samaj and say, 'Discrimination between castes must be abolished.' What do you think?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "People think like that when they have first developed love for God. A strong wind raises a lot of dust. Then you can't distinguish a mango tree from other trees. You can only see well when the tempest has blown over. When the first tempest of divine love has blown over, you gradually come to see that only God is the eternal substance[1] and all else is transitory. Without the company of the holy and the practice of austerity,

1. Shreya.

you can't realize this. What good is it to read the musical notation of a drum? It is very difficult to put them in practice. What use is there in just lecturing? You have to practice austerities. Only through them will you be able to realize.

"Distinction between the castes? There is only one way to wipe it away. That way is love for God. An untouchable becomes pure. An outcaste[1] is no longer an outcaste after attaining love for God. Chaitanya Deva embraced all, including outcastes.

"Brahmos chant the name of Hari. That's very good. If you call on God with a heart full of yearning, He will shower His grace, He will be realized.

"You can reach him by any path. God is one, but he is called various names. Hindus, for example, take water from one spot at a pond and call it jal. At another spot, Christians take water and call it water, and yet at another, Muslims take water and call it pani."

Surendra's brother: "Sir, what do you think of Theosophy?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "I was told that it leads to supernatural powers – miracles. At Deomodal's house I saw a fellow who had attained mastery over a ghost. The ghost would fetch a number of different things. What shall I do with occult powers? Does it help to realize God? If God can't be attained by them, they're all illusion."

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1. Pariah.

Section III

Sri Ramakrishna at the Brahmo Festival Celebrated at Mani Mallick's

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna has kindly agreed to visit Mani Mallick's Sinduriapatti house in Calcutta with the devotees. A Brahmo Samaj Festival is celebrated there every year. It is 4 p.m. on 26 November, 1882, the annual festival day. Vijaykrishna Goswami, many Brahmo devotees, Premahand Baral and many friends of Mani's are there. M is also present.

Manilal has arranged for elaborate entertainment. The life of Prahlada will be read, followed by a Brahmo worship. Then all the devotees will be served prasad.

Vijay is still a member of the Brahmo Samaj. He will conduct today's service. He has not yet put on the ochre robes of a sannyasin.

Prahlada's life is being narrated. Hiranyakashipu, the father of Prahlada, speaks ill of the Lord and tortures his son repeatedly. Prahlada prays to Lord Hari with folded hands, "O Hari, grant right understanding to my father." Hearing this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to weep. Vijay and others are sitting close to him. Thakur is in a state of ecstasy.

Sri Ramakrishna advises Vijay Goswami and other Brahmo devotees – teaching mankind only after attaining vision of God and His command

After awhile, Thakur says to Vijay and other devotees, "Bhakti is the essential thing. You acquire love for God by constantly chanting His name and glories. Ah! How great is Shivanath's love for God! Like a rasagolla.[1]

"It isn't good to think that only your religion is right and all others are wrong. A person can reach God by any path. Success is achieved by developing sincere yearning for God. As many beliefs – so many paths.

"Look here, God can be seen. He is beyond mind and speech – 'avāṅmanoagocara'. The Vedas say this. It means that He is invisible to a mind attached to worldly things. Vaishnavcharan used to say, 'He is visible to the pure intellect and the pure mind.'[2] That's why the company of the holy, prayer and the instruction of a preceptor (guru) are needed. They purify the chit (mind-stuff). That leads to God-vision. Muddy water can be cleaned by putting nirmali[3] in it. So much so that you can see your own face in it. You can't see your face in a dirty mirror.

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1. A cheese ball soaked in syrup.
2. mana eva manuṣyāṇāṁ kāraṇaṁ bandhamokṣayoḥ ।
   bandhāya viṣayāsaktaṁ muktyai nirviṣayaṁ smṛtamiti ।।
   maitrāyaṇī upaniṣad 4-10

[It is indeed the mind that is cause of men's bondage and liberation. The mind attached to sense objects leads to bondage while dissociated from sense-objects, it leads to liberation. So do the wise think.]

3. A fruit that cleans water.

"You attain God's vision by His grace, after you have attained love for Him, when your chitta has been cleansed. After God's vision, you have to receive His command before teaching people. It's not good to lecture before that. There's a song that says:

> O mind, what are you thinking about, sitting all alone? Without deep love, can the moon of Gaur appear?
>
> You have not dived into the love of Hari through your life.
>
> Eleven bats are creating confusion within your temple day and night.
>
> You have not installed Madhava in your temple. In vain do you make noise blowing on the conch.

"The temple of the heart must first be cleaned if you want to install the Lord's image there to worship. Nothing has been done, you are only blowing the conch. What good is that?"

Now Vijay Goswami goes to the altar and sits down. He conducts worship according to the Brahmo regulations. After that, he comes and sits close to Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): "Why do you people harp so much on sin? By saying, 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner' a hundred times, you become a sinner. Instead, you should have such faith that, because you have chanted His name, you think, how can sin attach to me? He is our Father, He is our Mother. Just tell Him that you will not repeat the sins you have committed. Then chant His name. Purify your mind, body and tongue completely with His name."

Chapter II

Conversation about free will with Baburam and others – Totapuri resolves to commit suicide

Sri Ramakrishna is talking in the verandah to the west of his room at the Dakshineswar Temple. It is evening. Baburam, M. and Ramdayal are with him. It is December, 1882. Baburam, Ramdayal and M. are going to stay for the night. They are on Christmas holiday. M. plans to stay on the next day. Recently Baburam has started visiting Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "A person is liberated when he realizes that everything is being done by God. Once Keshab Sen came with Sambhu Mallick. I said to him, 'Not even a leaf flutters on a tree except by God's will. Where is free will?' Everything is done by the will of God. Such a big man of knowledge, Nangta[1] was! But even he went to drown himself. He was here for eleven months. He was suffering from stomach trouble. Unable to bear pain of the disease, he went to drown himself in the Ganges. There was a long body of silt near the bathing steps. No matter how far he went into the water, he didn't feel water above his knees. He then understood and came back. Once I was severely depressed. I was going to cut my throat with a knife. So I say, 'Mother, I am only an instrument and You are the operator; I am a chariot, You the charioteer. I move as You make me move. I do what You make me do.'"

1. Totapuri.

There is music in Thakur's room. The devotees are singing:

O Kamalapati,[1] the lover of bhakti, if you dwell in the Vrindavan of my heart, my devotion to you will be like that of chaste Radha.

My wish for liberation will be like the milkmaids, and my body will be like the village of Nanda; my love will be like that of mother Yashoda.

Hold me, hold me, O Janardhana.[2] Lift the Govardhan weight of my sins.[3] Kill quickly the six messengers of kamsa, lust and so on.

Play on your flute of grace and tame the cows of my mind. I pray that You remain in this pasture of my heart and that I may have a glimpse of my ideal.

Dwell now and evermore with your heart full of affection for your servant under the Vanshivatta[4] of hope.

If you say that you are a prisoner of the love of the cowherds of Braja, then this Dasharathi, bereft of all spiritual knowledge, will become a cowherd and your slave.

Then they sang:

Sing, O bird in the cage of my heart.

Sitting under the wish-fulfilling tree of Brahman,

Sing, sing Its divine qualities,

And eat the ripe fruits of righteousness, wealth, legitimate desires and freedom.

Sreenath Mishra from Nandanbagan has arrived with friends. Looking at him, Thakur says, "I see everything within him through his eyes like

1. The husband of Kamala (Goddess Lakshmi).
2. A name of Lord Vishnu; the vanquisher of the demon Jana.
3. Krishna had lifted Mount Govardhan on his finger. So, the lifting the weight of sins means to mitigate the effects of sins.
4. A banyan tree at Vrindavan under which Krishna played his flute.

you see everything through a glass door." Sreenath, Srijnanath and the others belong to the Brahmo family of Nandan Bagan. Every year they celebrate a Brahmo festival at their house. Later, Thakur went there to take part in the festival.

After the evening arati is performed in the temple and sitting on the smaller cot in his room, Thakur meditates on God. Gradually he goes into ecstasy. When it has left him, he says, "Mother, attract him, too. He lives so very humbly. He visits You regularly."

Is Thakur talking about Baburam?

Baburam, M., Ramdayal and some others are sitting on the floor. It is between eight and nine at night. Thakur explains the nature of different kinds of samadhi: jada samadhi,[1] chetana samadhi,[2] stitha samadhi[3] and unmana samadhi.[4]

Vidyasagar and Genghis Khan. Is God cruel? Sri Ramakrishna's answer

They now talk of happiness and sorrow – why has God created so much pain?

M.: "Vidyasagar says, irritated, 'What is the use of calling on God? When Genghis Khan began looting, he took a great number of prisoners, almost a hundred thousand. The commanders of his army went to him and said, 'Sir, what shall we give them

1. Communion with God in which the aspirant appears lifeless, like an inert object.
2. Communion with God while being conscious of I-ness, aware of a relationship with God.
3. *Stitha* samadhi means steady samadhi.
4. *Unmana* samadhi means sudden samadhi.

to eat? It's great trouble to keep them all with us. What can we do? Releasing them will also create problems.' Genghis Khan said, 'What else can we do? Just kill them all!' Thus were they ordered to be beheaded. Didn't God see this massacre? He didn't help at all. If He is there, let Him be, but I don't find any need for Him. Nothing good has come to me from Him.'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Can anyone understand what God is doing and for what purpose? He creates, preserves and dissolves – all of these. How can we know why He destroys? I say, 'Mother, I have no need to understand, only grant me love and devotion for Your feet.' The aim of man's life is to achieve love for God. The rest of it the Mother knows. I've come to the orchard to eat mangoes. Why do I need to sit down and count how many trees, how many branches and how many millions of leaves there are? I just eat mangoes. I don't need to keep account of trees and leaves."

Tonight Baburam, M. and Ramdayal sleep on the floor in Thakur's room.

Early in the morning, about 2 or 3 o'clock, the light in Thakur's room is lowered. Thakur, sitting on his bed, talks to them now and then.

Sri Ramakrishna, Baburam, M. and others - compassion and maya – hard austerities and realization of God

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and the other devotees*): "Look here, compassion and maya are two different things. Maya is like attachment to father, mother, brother, sister, wife and son – love for them. On the

other hand, compassion is love for everybody, the same regard for all. When you see compassion in a person, say Vidyasagar, know that it comes from God. By compassion a person serves all living beings. Maya also comes from God. He makes people serve their relatives through maya. But then, this is the point – maya makes a person ignorant – it binds. But compassion purifies the mind and gradually frees the person from bondage.

"Without purity of the mind, one cannot realize God. His grace dawns when desire, anger, greed and all that has been overcome. Let me tell you something very secret. I did many things to overcome lust. I circumambulated the ananda–asana[1] several times, saying, 'Victory to Kali, Victory to Kali.'

"When I was 10 or 11 years old and in my village, I experienced the state of samadhi. I saw something when I was walking across a field. I was completely overwhelmed. There are signs of God-vision. You see light, feel joy, and feel the mahavayu[2] rising like a rocket up into the chest."

Baburam and Ramdayal left for their homes the next day but M. stayed with Thakur through the following night. He took his meals from the temple.

1. A sexual union of man and woman according to Tantra.
2. A current felt in the spinal column when the kundalini is awakened.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with Marwari Devotees at Dakshineswar

It is afternoon. M. and a couple of devotees are here. Many Marwari[1] devotees enter and salute. They have business in Calcutta. Coming to Thakur, they say, "Kindly advise us." Thakur laughs.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Marwari devotees*): "Look, 'I' and 'mine' both mean ignorance. O Lord, You are the doer and everything is Yours. This is spiritual knowledge. Then how can you say that a certain thing is 'mine'? The guard of the orchard says: It is my garden. But if he makes a mistake, the owner dismisses him. Then he doesn't even have the courage to take his mango-wood box[2] with him. Desire, anger and these things don't leave you. So turn them towards God. If you have desire, if you are greedy, have desire and greed to attain God. Reason this out and turn away from them. When an elephant begins to eat somebody's banana plant, the mahout strikes it with his goad.

"You people are in business. You know very well that a person becomes successful only gradually. Somebody may install a castor oil factory, but when he's earned more money, he opens a cloth shop. In the same way, a person has to proceed up the path to God. When you've gone higher, maybe you'll live in solitude now and then and call upon Him more intensely.

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1. People of Rajasthan who migrated to Kolkata to trade and do business there.
2. Meaning an object of trifling value.

"But then, nothing happens before its time. Some people have to experience a lot of worldly enjoyment. So it happens late. If you cut open a boil before it's ripe, the result is the opposite of what is good. When it is ripe and oozes pus, the doctor uses his knife. A child said to its mother, 'Wake me up when I have to go to the toilet.' His mother replied, 'Child, you'll know when you have to go. I won't have to wake you up." (*Everyone laugh.*)

Telling lies in business and Marwari devotees – chanting the name of Rama

The Marwari devotees sometimes bring sweets, fruits, sugar candy and other things for Thakur. The sugar candy is scented with the fragrance of roses. But Thakur doesn't eat any of these things. He says, "These people tell so many lies to make money." He casually tells the Marwaris present, "You see, you can't be absolutely truthful in business. There are always ups and downs. Nanak once said, 'When I went to eat something at a worldly man's house, I saw it stained with blood.' Holy men should only be given pure things. Nothing earned by dishonest means should be given to them. Truth is attained by the path of truth.[1]

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1. satyena labhyastapasā hyeṣa ātmā
samyagjñānena brahmacaryeṇa nityam
muṇḍakopaniṣat 3-1-5
[This Atman is verily attainable through truth, concentration, complete knowledge and continence, practiced constantly.]
satyameva jayate nānṛtaṁ
muṇḍakopaniṣat 3-1-6
[Truth alone wins and not untruth.]

"A person should always repeat God's name. While working, keep your mind on Him. It's like this: I have a boil on my back. I attend to all my work, but my mind remains on the boil. Repeating Rama's name is good. Rama, the son of Dasharatha, is also He who has created the world and who dwells in all. He is very near to you – within and without.

Rama, who was the son of Dasharatha, dwells within all.

The same Rama has created the world, this Rama is best of all.

Section IV

Sri Ramakrishna in Joyful Singing at the House of Govinda Mukherji in a Village in Belgharia – With Narendra and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is visiting Govinda Mukherji in Belgharia. Today is Sunday, 18 February 1883, the 7th day of Falgun, the 12th day of the bright fortnight of Magha, the constellation of Pushya.[1] Narendra, Ram, other devotees and a neighbour are also there. By seven or eight o'clock in the morning, Thakur dances with Narendra and others during the kirtan.

Advice to people in Belgharia – why salute? Why the path of devotion?

When the singing is ended, everybody sits down. Many of them salute Thakur. Now and then he says, "Offer your salutations to God." And he adds, "It is He Himself who dwells in all forms, though there is greater manifestation of His power in some – for example, in holy people. You might say there are wicked people as well as tigers, but you don't have to embrace God in the tiger. Just salute him from a distance and then go away. Think of water. Some water is fit for drinking and some fit for offering worship. But some is used for bathing. Also, there's water to gargle with and water used for the toilet."

1. The 8th of the twenty-seven stars according to Hindu astronomy.

Neighbour: "Sir, what are the doctrines of Vedanta?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Vedantists say, 'So 'ham, I am He' – Brahman is the Reality, the world is an illusion. The ego is also an illusion. Only the Supreme Brahman exists.

"But this I-ness doesn't go away. So it's good to have the feeling, 'I am His servant,' or 'I am His child,' or 'I am His devotee.'

"For the Kaliyuga, the path of devotion is especially good. God can be realized by love and devotion. As long as you have body-consciousness, you are conscious of objects – form, taste, smell, sound, and touch. These are all sense objects. It's very difficult to get rid of the consciousness of sense objects. As long as you are conscious of objects, you can't say, 'I am He.[1]'

"People of renunciation have less consciousness of worldly things, but worldly people are always thinking about them. So the attitude, 'I am Thy servant'[2] is good for them."

The theory of sin and the residents of Belgharia

Neigbhour: "We are sinners. What will happen to us?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "When you chant God's name, all sins of the body fly away. The bird of sin is

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1. avyaktā hi gatirduḥkhaṁ dehavadbhiravāpyate ||
   gītā 12-5
   [for the goal of the Unmanifest is very hard for the embodied to reach.]
2. Daso 'ham [So 'ham means "I am He"; Daso 'ham means "I am the servant of God"].

perched on the tree of the body. Chanting His name is like clapping your hands. As you clap, all the birds on the tree fly away. Sin flies away when you chant His name and glory.[1]

"Look, water in a reservoir dug in a dry field dries up by the heat of the sun. In the same way, the water of the reservoir of sin evaporates by chanting His name and glories.

"You have to practice every day. At the circus I saw an English woman standing on the back of a horse on one foot while it galloped around the track. How much practice was necessary to achieve that!

"Weep at least once to see God.

"There are two ways: practice and love for God – that is to say, yearning to see Him."

Singing of the six spiritual centers by the resident of Belgharia and Sri Ramakrishna's samadhi

Thakur is having his meal with devotees on the verandah of the parlour on the first floor. It is one o'clock. No sooner is the meal over than a devotee begins to sing in the courtyard below.

Awake, awake Mother.

How long have you been asleep in the Muladhara, O Mother Kulkundalini?

Hearing the song, Thakur goes into samadhi. His whole body is stiff, his hand remaining on the plate as in a picture. There is no more eating. After

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1.māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja । ahaṁ tvāṁ sarvapāpebhyo mokṣyayiṣyāmi
gītā 18-66
[Take refuge in Me alone; I will liberate you from all sins.]

a long time, when his ecstatic mood has somewhat passed, he says, "I want to go downstairs. I want to go downstairs."

A devotee takes him down with great care.

It was in this courtyard this morning that Thakur had danced joyfully in ecstasy while God's name had been chanted. The carpet and seats are still there. Thakur is still in an ecstatic mood. He walks over and sits close to the singer, who has by now stopped singing. In a most humble way, Thakur says, "Sir, I would like very much to hear the Mother's name again."

The singer sings:

Awake, awake Mother,

How long have you been asleep in the Muladhara, O Mother Kulkundalini?

Accomplish Your work. Rise to the head where the Supreme Shiva sits on a thousand- petalled lotus.

O my Mother, piercing through the six spiritual centres, O Mother, the image of consciousness, erase the pain of my heart.

Listening to the song, Thakur goes into ecstasy again.

Chapter II

Thakur with devotees at Dakshineswar on the new moon day[1] – his maternal love for Rakhal

Thakur Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room with Rakhal and some other devotees. Today, Friday 9

1. Amavasya.

March 1883, the 26th day of Falgun, Amavasya in the month of Magha, time about 8 or 9 in the morning.

Thakur is always inspired by the Mother of the Universe on a new moon day. He says, "'God alone is Reality, everything else is unreal.' The Divine Mother has enchanted everyone with Her spell.[1] Of men, most are bound. They suffer so much pain and sorrow. But they remain attached to 'lust and greed'. Blood streams from the mouth of a camel when it eats thorny bushes. But it doesn't stop eating them. When a woman in labour pain says, 'My sister, I am not going to be with my husband again' – she forgets.

"Look, nobody seeks God. Leaving aside the fruit of the pineapple, people eat the leaves."

Devotee: "Sir, why does God keep us in worldly life?"

Why the world? To purify the mind through selfless work

Sri Ramakrishna: "The world is the field of action. A person attains spiritual knowledge through work. The guru says, 'Do this work but don't do that.' He advises you to perform work without expectation of any reward.[2] The mind is purified through work. Whatever disease you may be suffering from will be cured when you take the medicine prescribed by a good doctor.

"Why doesn't He free you from the world? He will do so when you are cured. He'll free you when

1. Mahamaya.
2. Karmaṇyevādhikāraste gītā 2-47 [Your right is to work only.]

you have rid yourself of the desire to enjoy 'woman and gold'. Having been registered as a patient in the hospital, you can't run away. As long as your disease is not fully cured, your doctor won't discharge you."

These days Thakur, like Yashoda, overflows with motherly love. That's why he has kept Rakhal with him. Thakur has a mother's love for Rakhal. Just as a child sits close to the lap of its mother to suck milk from her breast, Rakhal leans onto Thakur's lap.

Sri Ramakrishna watches the flood-tide of the Ganges with the devotees

Thakur is in the same mood when someone comes to give news that the flood-tide of the river is about to rise. Thakur, Rakhal, M. and all the others run toward the Panchavati to see it. They stand at the edge of the Panchavati to watch. It is about half past ten.

Seeing a boat in distress Thakur says, "Look! God knows what's going to happen to that boat."

Now he sits on the path to the Panchavati with M., Rakhal and the others.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "What causes the flood-tide?"

M. draws a diagram on the ground and tries to explain the position of the earth, moon, sun, gravitation, flood-tide, ebb-tide, the full-moon day, the darkest day, an eclipse, and so on.

Sri Ramakrishna in school during his childhood – a yogi is beyond all finite relationships of number, quantity, cause and effect

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Stop it! I can't understand. It makes me feel giddy. My head is aching! How can they know things so far away?

"You see, in childhood I could draw good pictures, but Subhankar's arithmetic confused me. I couldn't learn arithmetic."

Thakur now returns to his room. Looking at Yashoda's picture on the wall, he says, "This picture isn't done well. She looks like a flower-girl."

First meeting with Adhar Sen – talk about animal sacrifice

After the midday meal, Thakur rests awhile. Adhar Sen and other devotees gradually assemble. It is Adhar Sen's first visit to Thakur. His home is in Benetola in Calcutta. He is a Deputy Magistrate, 29 or 30 years old.

Circumstances and non-violence

Adhar (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Sir, I have a question to ask. Is it all right to sacrifice an animal to the Deity? This involves killing."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The scriptures say that sacrifices can be made on special occasions. There's no harm doing it according to injunctions. For example, the sacrifice of a goat on the 8th day of the lunar month. But it can't be done in all situations. I'm in the state now when I can't stand the sight. I can't eat the meat offered to the Divine Mother. So I touch it and make a tilak mark with it on my forehead so She won't be angry with me later.

"And sometimes I'm in a state when I see God in all beings – even in ants. In that state when I see someone die, I have the consolation that only the body is destroyed, that there is no death of the soul.[1]"

Advice to Adhar – don't reason too much

"It isn't good to reason too much. It's enough to have love and devotion for the lotus feet of the Mother. Too much reasoning leads to utter confusion. If you take water from the surface of the pond here, you will get very clean water. But if you dip your hand deep into it and stir it, the water becomes muddy. So pray to God for love and devotion. Dhruva's devotion was motivated – he practiced austerities to gain a kingdom. But Prahlada's devotion was motiveless, *ahetuki* bhakti."

A Devotee: "How can you attain God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Through this very love for Him. But you have to force your demands on Him. 'Grant me Your darshan, or I will cut my throat!' This is called the tamas of bhakti."

The Devotee: "Can God be seen?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, certainly God can be seen. It's possible to see both God with form and God without form. You can see God with form as Spirit Personified. But He can also be seen as manifest Himself. Seeing an incarnation of God is

1. Bhagavad Gita 2:20.

the same as seeing God Himself. God incarnates in human form in every age.[1]"

1. Bhagavad Gita 4:8.

Section V

Sri Ramakrishna with Brahmo Devotees at Brahmo Samaj in Sinthi

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna has arrived at the garden house of Beni Pal in Sinthi, where the semi-annual celebration of the Brahmo Samaj is taking place. It is Sunday, 22 April 1883, in the afternoon of the full-moon day of Chaitra, 10th of Vaishakh. Many Brahmo devotees have come. They sit around Thakur in the southern courtyard. After twilight Becharam, a teacher of the Samaj, will conduct worship.

The Brahmo devotees now and then ask Thakur questions.

A Brahmo Devotee: "Sir, what is the way?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The way is devotion – love for God, and prayer."

The Devotee: "Love or prayer?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Love first, then prayer."

O mind, call upon the Divine Mother with a real cry. How can Mother Shyama then keep herself from coming?

Sri Ramakrishna sings the song and then continues: "One should chant His name and sing His glories continuously, and pray to Him. An old pot has to be cleaned every day. Cleaning it just once won't do. And one should practice discrimination and non-attachment, being conscious of the fact that the world is transitory."

The Brahmo devotee and renunciation of worldly life – selfless work in the world

The Brahmo Devotee: "Is it good to renounce worldly life?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Renunciation of worldly life is not for everyone. It is not for those whose desire for worldly enjoyment has not yet ended. Can you get drunk on only thirty millilitres of wine?"

The Brahmo Devotee: "So they should lead a worldly life?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, they should try to work without expectation of any reward. They should break open the jack-fruit after rubbing their hands with oil. A maid in a rich man's house attends to all her work, but her mind dwells in her village. This is called working without attachment.[1] It is called renunciation in mind. You should renounce mentally, while a sannyasin should renounce both outwardly and mentally."

Brahmo devotee and end of worldly enjoyment – nature of a spiritual woman – when does dispassion occur?

The Brahmo Devotee: "What is the end of the desire for worldly enjoyment?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Worldly enjoyment means enjoyment of 'lust and greed'. It is a great problem for a delirious patient to live in a room where tamarind pickles and water are stored. Until a person has enjoyed money, name and fame, bodily comforts and so on – until the desire for worldly

1. Bhagavad Gita 9:27.

enjoyments has ended – he doesn't feel a longing for God."

The Brahmo Devotee: "Who is bad, we or women?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "There are women with spiritual qualities just as there are women who are ignorant of the value of spirituality. A spiritually-minded woman takes you to God and one who is not spiritually-minded makes you forget Him and drown in worldliness.

"This world and worldly life are due to His Mahamaya. In it are both the power of knowledge and power of ignorance. When you take refuge in the power of knowledge, you keep the company of the holy, imbibe spiritual knowledge, love for God, dispassion and so on. In the power of ignorance are all things pertaining to the five elements and the five senses – sight, taste, smell, touch, hearing. They all give worldly enjoyment and make you forget God."

The Brahmo Devotee: "If it makes you ignorant, why has God created it?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's His divine play. If there were no darkness, you would not realize the importance of light. If there were no sorrow, you wouldn't appreciate happiness. The knowledge of good depends on the knowledge of bad.

"Besides, the fruit of a mango develops and ripens because of its skin. It's only when the fruit is ripe that the skin can be thrown away. It's only when the skin of maya is present that a person can gradually attain the knowledge of Brahman.

Knowledge and ignorance are like the skin of the mango. They are both necessary."

The Brahmo Devotee: "Is it all right to worship a form, or a deity made of clay?"[1]

Sri Ramakrishna: "You don't believe in God with form. That's all right. The image of God is not meant for you, only the feeling. Just the feeling of attraction, like Radha's attraction for Krishna. Accept the love. Those who believe in God with form worship Kali, worship Mother Durga. How much they call on Her, crying, 'Mother, Mother!' How much they love! Accept that feeling. You don't have to accept the image."

The Brahmo Devotee: "How do you develop non-attachment? Why doesn't everyone have it?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You don't develop non-attachment until the desire for worldly enjoyment is silenced. A child is made to forget everything else by giving him something to eat or a toy to play with. But when his eating and playing are over, he cries, 'I want mummy!' If he isn't taken to his mother, he throws away the doll and screams."

Sat-chit-ananda Itself is the Guru – after God-realization, rituals such as evening worship end

The Brahmo devotees don't believe in the tradition of gurus. Now they talk about it.

Brahmo Devotee: "Sir, is it impossible to attain knowledge of God without a Guru?"

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1. Refers to Sri Ramakrishna's instruction to Keshab – 'The Goddess of consciousness in the clay image.'

Sri Ramakrishna: "Sat-chit-ananda Himself is the guru. If a man as a guru awakens your spiritual consciousness, it is Sat-chit-ananda Himself who has taken up that form. A guru is a companion who leads you by the hand. After God-realization, the distinction between guru and disciple ceases. 'It is a very difficult situation when the guru and the disciple can't differentiate each other.' That's why Janaka said to Sukadeva, 'Please give me the teacher's fee first if you want the knowledge of Brahman.' He said this because after attaining the knowledge of Brahman, the guru and the disciple wouldn't be able to distinguish between each other. As long as there is no vision of God, the relationship of guru and disciple exists."

The evening gradually sets in. Some of the Brahmo devotees say to Thakur, "It must be your time for evening worship."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, that's not so. All this is done somewhat in the beginning. Later, there's no need for rituals or worship items like *kosha* and *kushi*.[1]"

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and the Brahmo teacher, Becharam – Vedanta and Brahman

In the evening Becharam, the Adi Brahmo Samaj teacher, conducts the service from the pulpit. It is interspersed with Brahmo music and reading from the Upanishads. After the service, the teacher

1. Fish-shaped spoons, one larger than the other, used in ritualistic worship.

sits with Sri Ramakrishna and has a long conversation with him.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, what is your opinion? Are both God with and without form true?"

God-with-form, God-without-form, image of Consciousness and the devotee

Teacher: "Sir, God without form is like an electric current that you can't see, but can experience."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, both are true – both God-with-form and formless God. Do you know what it's like to speak only of God without form? It's like a person playing only one note on a sanai that has seven holes. Another person plays many different melodies on the instrument. In the same way, people who believe in God-with-form enjoy Him in so many ways – the serene attitude, the attitude of His servant, friendship, with maternal feelings, and of a lover[1] – so many moods.

"Do you know what the heart of the matter is? To fall somehow into the pool of nectar. Whether it is achieved by singing hymns or by being pushed into it by someone, the result is the same. Both ways bring the same immortality.[2]

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1. Shanta, dasya, sakhya, vatsalya and madhura.

2. brahmaivedamamṛtaṁ purastādbrahma paścādbrahma dakṣiṇataścottareṇa ।
adhaścordhvaṁ ca prasṛtaṁ brahmaivedaṁ viśvamidaṁ variṣṭham ।।
muṇḍakopaniṣat 2-2-1
[All that is in front is but the immortal Brahman. The immortal Brahman is behind, and also on the right and the left. It reveals everything above and below. This world is nothing but the supreme Brahman.]

"A good illustration for Brahmo devotees is of water and ice. Sat-chit-ananda is like an infinite ocean. At various places in cold places, the water takes the form of ice. In the same way, Sat-chit-ananda Brahman,[1] due to the cooling influence of devotees' love and devotion for Him, takes forms[2] for them. The rishis saw His supersensuous Spirit form[3] [transcendental] and talked to Him. Devotees see His Spirit form through the body of ecstatic love.[4]

"But then, Brahman is beyond speech and mind. Blocks of ice (God with form) melt under the heat of the sun of knowledge. After attaining the knowledge of Brahman, after attaining nirvikalpa samadhi, He is again the same Infinite, beyond speech and mind, formless Brahman without shape.

"The real nature of Brahman can't be described in words. One becomes silent. Who can describe the infinite in words? However high a bird may fly, there is still more space above it. What do you say?"

Teacher: "Yes sir. The Vedanta does say that."

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1. Brahman without attributes.
2. Brahman with attributes.
3. Atindriya.
4. prayujyamāne mayi tāṁ śuddhāṁ bhāgavatīṁ tanum ।
ārabdhakarmanirvāṇo nyapatatpāñcabhautikaḥ ।।
śrīmadbhāgavata 1-6-29
[Narada said, "I have attained the divine body, pure and omnipresent." When that Bhagavati-tanu, the divine body of Sudha-Sattva fit for the service of the Lord, was generated in me, my body of the gross material elements fell dead on the exhaustion of that quantum of my karma responsible for the previous embodiment.]

Brahman without attributes is beyond speech and mind – beyond the three gunas

Sri Ramakrishna: "A salt doll went to measure the ocean. It didn't return to give a report. There's a view that Sukadeva and others experienced the sight and touch of Brahman – but they did not dive into it.

"I said to Vidyasagar that everything has been polluted by speech – but not Brahman.[1] In other words, nobody has been able to say what Brahman is. The moment you say something, it becomes polluted. Vidyasagar was a learned man. He was pleased to hear this.

"I've heard that there are snow-covered mountains near Kedarnath. If you climb very high there you can't return. Those who climbed them to find out what was there at such great height, or what you'd experience there, never returned to tell about it.

"A man is overwhelmed with Bliss when he attains God's vision. He can't utter a word. Who will give the report? Who will explain?

"The king lives behind seven gates**.** A powerful person sits at every gate. At each gate the disciple asks if it is the king. The guru replies, 'No. Not this, not this.' What the disciple sees at the seventh gate strikes him dumb.[2] He is overwhelmed with joy.[1]

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1. acintyam avyapadeśyam … advaitam
māṇḍūkyopaniṣat 7

2. yato vāco nivartante . aprāpya manasā saha. taittirīyaopaniṣad 2-4-1

[One is not subjected to fear at any time if one knows the Bliss that is Brahman.]

He doesn't have to ask whether it is the king he's seeing. As soon as he looks at him, all his doubts vanish."

Teacher: "True, sir. The Vedanta does say this."

Sri Ramakrishna: "When He creates, preserves and dissolves, he is called Brahman with attributes or the Primal Power.[2] When he is beyond the three gunas, he's called Brahman without attributes, beyond speech and mind – the Supreme Brahman.

"Falling under the spell of maya, a man forgets his real nature – inheritor of his father's limitless wealth. Maya consists of the three gunas.[3] All three are dacoits. They rob a person of everything. They make him forget his real nature. They are sattva, rajas and tamas. Of them, only sattva can show the way to God, but not even this guna can take you to God.

"A rich man was walking along a path in the forest when three dacoits came and surrounded him. They robbed him of everything he had. After they'd snatched everything from him, one of the dacoits said, 'What's the use of sparing his life? Kill him.' Saying this, he stepped forward to cut the man to pieces. The second dacoit said, 'It's not necessary to kill him. Let's tie him up and leave him here. Then he won't be able to tell the police.' Saying this, they tied him up and left him there. A

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1. bhidyate hṛdayagranthiśchidyante sarvasaṁśayāḥ,
kṣīyante cāsya karmāṇi tasmin dṛṣṭe parāvare | muṇḍakopaniṣad 2-2-8
[The knot of the heart gets untied, all doubts become solved, and all one's actions become dissipated.]
2. Adyashakti.
3. Qualities or cosmic energies.

little later the third dacoit returned and said to him, 'Oh, how great your suffering must be! Let me untie you.' After freeing him, he took the man with him and showed him the way. When they reached the main road, he said, 'Go on this road and you'll reach home easily.' The man said, 'What do you mean, sir? Please come with me. You've done so much for me. I would be very pleased if you'd come to my home.' The dacoit said, 'No, I can't go there. The police would catch me.' Saying this, while pointing the way, the dacoit left.

"The first dacoit is tamas – the one who said, 'What good will it do to spare his life? Kill him.' Tamas leads to destruction. The second dacoit was rajas. Rajas binds man to the world – entangles him in different kinds of activity. Rajas makes a person forget God. Only sattva can show the way. Compassion, charity, love for God, etc. all come from sattva. Sattva is like the last landing of a staircase – beyond it there is only the roof. The supreme Brahman is one's own natural home. Unless a person goes beyond the three gunas, he does not attain the knowledge of Brahman."

Teacher: "What a clear explanation!"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Do you know the nature of a devotee? 'Let me speak and you listen, and when you speak, I will listen.' You are a religious teacher. You teach so many people. You are a ship, but we are small fishing boats." (*They all laugh.*)

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna's enjoyment of Hari's kirtan – Sri Ramakrishna in the Haribhakti Pradayani Sabha (house of worship) in Ram Chandra's house

Sri Ramakrishna has arrived at the Kansari Para Haribhakti Pradayani Sabha in Calcutta. It is Sunday, 13 May 1883, 31st day of Vaishakh, 1290 (B.Y.), the 7th day of the bright fortnight of Sankranti. The society is celebrating its annual festival. Manohar Sai is conducting the kirtan.

The topic of the song is 'pique.' Radha's companions are saying to her, "Why are you piqued? It seems that you don't care about Krishna's happiness." Radha says, "It's not because he's gone to Chandravali's grove. Why should he go there? She doesn't know how to serve him."

The next Sunday, 20 May 1883, there is a kirtan again at Ram Chandra's house, 'The Song of Mathura.' Thakur has arrived. The 14th day of the bright fortnight of Vaishakh, the 7th of Jaishtha. 'The Song of Mathura' is now being sung. Radha is saying many things regarding her separation from Krishna. She has wanted to see Shyam[1] since she was a child. "Friend, my nails have worn down by counting the days on my fingers. Look, the garland he gave has dried up, but I have not thrown it away. Where has the moon of Krishna appeared now? It seems that it has run away in fear of pique. Oh, when shall I see that cloud of Krishna again? Will I ever see it again? O friend, I have never been able to see you to my heart's content. For I have only two eyes, and over them my eyelids blink and tears stream. The peacock feather on his head is like an unmoving flash of lightning. Peacocks, seeing the cloud of his figure, would raise their wings and dance."

1. Dark-hued Krishna.

"Friend, I cannot survive – please place this body on the branch of the Tamal tree and write Krishna's name on it."

Sri Ramakrishna says, "God and His name are one and the same. That's why Radha is saying this. He who is Rama is also His name."

Immersed in ecstasy, Thakur listens to this Mathur kirtan. A goswami musician is singing the songs. The same songs will be sung at Dakshineswar on Sunday, and then again sung at Adhar's house the following Sunday.

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Sri Ramakrishna is standing in his room at the Dakshineswar temple and talking to the devotees. Sunday today, 27 May 1883, 14th of Jaishtha, the 5th day of the dark fortnight, time about nine o'clock. The devotees have assembled gradually.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "It's not good to have hostility – it's not good that the Shaktas, the Vaishnavas and the Vedantists quarrel with each other. Padmalochan was the court pundit in Burdwan. A discussion was going on in a meeting about who was greater, Shiva or Brahma. Padmalochan gave a beautiful reply: 'I don't know. I haven't talked to either Shiva or Brahma.' (*They all laugh.*)

"If you have earnest longing, you can attain Him by any path. But you must be steadfast. There's

another name for single-minded devotion,[1] chaste devotion.[2] Think of a tree with a single trunk. It grows straight up. Other devotion is like a tree with five branches. The gopis had such single-minded devotion that they didn't want to see any person but the shepherd[3] Krishna of Vrindavan wearing his peacock feather crown and yellow loin-cloth. When they saw Krishna in Mathura in royal dress with a turban on his head, they drew down their veils and said, 'Who is he? Should we become unchaste by talking to him?'

"The way a wife serves her husband is also single-minded devotion. She serves food to her husband's younger and elder brothers and gives them water to wash their feet, but she has quite a different relationship with her husband. In the same way, you can have single-minded devotion to your own religion, but you shouldn't show malice to other religions because of it. Instead, you should conduct yourself with them in a sweet manner."

Thakur goes to the Kali Temple after a dip in the Ganges. He is accompanied by M. Sitting on the worshipper's seat, he offers flowers at the lotus feet of the Divine Mother. From time to time he puts them on his head and meditates.

Worship of the Mother of the Universe and of Self – mantra for destroying danger – dancing

Thakur rises from his seat after quite some time. He is absorbed with emotion and dances and

1. Nishtha bhakti.
2. Avyabhicharini bhakti.
3. Gopal.

chants the name of the Mother. He says, "O Mother! Destroyer of all the trials in life, Remover of adversity."

There is bound to be sorrow and adversity for an embodied person. It seems that he might be reciting this great mantra for destroying danger and calling on Her with a yearning heart to teach humanity.

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna and Nakur Babaji of Jhamapukur

Now Thakur comes to sit on the verandah to the west of his room. He is still in ecstasy. Rakhal, M., Nakur Vaishnava and some others are near him. Thakur has known Nakur Vaishnava for twenty-eight or twenty-nine years. When Sri Ramakrishna first came to Calcutta and lived at Jhamapukur, he used to perform worship at different houses. At that time he would sit at Nakur Vaishnava's shop and enjoy his company. Now Nakur Vaishnava comes almost every year to see Thakur during Raghav Pandit's celebrations in Panihati. Nakur is a devout Vaishnava and sometimes celebrates festivals. He lives in M.'s neighbourhood. He showed M. the old house belonging to Govinda Chatterji where Thakur lived when he was in Jhamapukur.

Sri Ramakrishna enjoys the singing of the name of the Mother of the Universe

Filled to overflowing with emotion, Thakur sings:

Kali ever-joyous, the beloved of Shiva![1] Mother, You dance and clap Your hands of your own accord.

1. Mahakala.

O Eternal Primal Power, the image of the zero-shaped moon, where did You get Your garland of skeletons when there was no universe?

You are the great mechanic while we are instruments in Your hand, moving at Your will.

We do what You make us do Mother, we speak the way You make us speak.

O attributeless Mother, fondly berating You, Kamalakanta says – O Mother, the destroyer of all, You have swallowed both piety and impiety with the sword in Your hand.

Again he sings:

Mother! you are Tara,

Mother! You are Tara,[1] though You have assumed the three gunas, and You are the Limitless.

I know You are merciful to the lowly, the one who removes all distress.

You are sandhya, You are Gayatri, You are the support of the Universe, O Mother!

You are the savior of yearning souls; You have stolen the heart of Shiva.

You are in water; You are in earth; You are the root of the Beginning.

In all bodies You dwell, in all beings, in that with form and without.

Again he sings:

There is mal in golmal, leave out gol and hang onto mal.

[Pun on the word golmal which means confusion, but is composed of two words gol [disorder] and mal [wealth]].

And again:

1. The savior, literally "she who takes one across [the ocean of worldly existence]".

O mind, we have no business here! Let us go to that region of the stars

And:

O Mother Shankari! The boat of my body is sinking in the sea of the world. The tempest of maya and infatuation is gradually rising.

And then:

Come, Mother. Let mother and son talk a little about suffering,

Some elephants carry a canopy. And some have tasty curd on dried roasted rice.

Sri Ramakrishna says to the devotees, "It's not good to only talk of sorrow to householders. You should be cheerful. Those who are used to going without food can fast for two days. But others, whose meals are only somewhat delayed, fall ill. It isn't good to talk to them only about sad things and about sorrow.

"Vaishnavcharan used to say, "What's this, just saying 'Sin, sin. Enjoy yourself!'"

Thakur has not rested for even a short time after his meal before Manohar Sai Goswami arrives.

Sri Ramakrishna is filled with ecstasy in the attitude of Sri Radha – Is it Thakur or Gauranga?

The goswami is singing a kirtan about the first intimations of love.[1] Listening to it for only a short time, Thakur becomes absorbed in the ecstatic mood of Radha.

1. Purvaraga.

The beginning song is about Gaur Chandrika. "With your hand on your palm – worried – Gaur, why are you downcast today?" Perhaps he is absorbed in Radha.

The goswami sings another song:

She slowly moves in and out of the room, again and again.

Why is her mind distracted? She is breathing rapidly.

She looks steadily at the Kadamba forest.

(Radha, what has happened to you?)

Hearing this line, Sri Ramakrishna goes into a deep mood.[1] He tears the shirt off his body and throws it away.

When the singer sings, "Her cool limbs become motionless at a soft touch," Thakur trembles in mahabhava.

(*Looking at Kedar*) Thakur says in the singing tone of the kirtan, "O the master of my soul, the beloved of my heart, bring Krishna here; a friend of one's heart should do this. Either bring him here or take me there. I will remain your maid-servant forever."

The singer, the goswami, is overwhelmed to see Thakur's divine state. Folding his hands, he says, "Please take away my worldly tendencies."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "'The sadhu has found a place to stay.'[2] You are such a sweet person and express many sweet ideas."

1. Mahabhava.
2. Ref: A holy man who visits the city after first finding lodging.

The goswami: "Sir, I am like an ox carrying a load of sugar. But I haven't been able to taste it."

The kirtan continues. The singer describes Radha's condition. 'The cuckoo is warbling sweetly.' Hearing it, perhaps Radha is reminded of the sounds of Vraja, which is why she chants the name of Jaimini. She says, "Gopi friend, this life of mine will not survive separation from Krishna. Please place this body on a branch of the tamal tree."

The goswami ends the kirtan after singing of the meeting of Radha and Krishna.

Section VI

Sri Ramakrishna at Balaram's and Adhar's houses in Calcutta

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is on his way from the Dakshineswar Temple to Balaram's house in Calcutta. From Balaram's house, he will go to Adhar's and then to Ram's. Manohar Sai will conduct a kirtan at Adhar's house, and there will be a reading and exposition of the scriptures[1] interspersed with music at Ram's house. Today is Saturday, 2 June 1883, the 20th day of Jaishtha, the 12th day of the dark fortnight.

In the carriage on his way Thakur says to Rakhal, M. and the others, "Look, all sins flee when you develop love for Him, like the water in an open pond dries up in the heat of the sun."

Sannyasin and householder's sense attachments

"A person doesn't attain [the goal] as long as there is still love for sense objects, for 'lust and gold'. A person doesn't attain if he has attachment to sense enjoyments even if he embraces monastic life. That's like swallowing your own spittle after spitting it out."

Still in the carriage, Thakur adds in a little while, "Brahmos don't believe in God with form. (*Smiling*) Narendra says, 'It's idol worship.' He also says, 'He [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] still goes to the Kali Temple.'"

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1. Kathakta.

Sri Ramakrishna's vision of Nara Lila (divine sport as man) and enjoying it

Thakur has come to Balaram's house.

Suddenly he goes into an ecstasy. It seems he is seeing that God has become the world and all its creatures, that He is moving around as a human being, because he says to the Mother of the Universe, "Mother, what are you showing me now? Wait! What are you are showing me through Rakhal and others? All forms have vanished. And Mother, man is nothing but a pillow-case. Man's consciousness is Yours only."

"Mother, the Brahmos aren't tasting sweetness. Their eyes are dry and so are their faces**.** Nothing at all is achieved without love and devotion for God.

"Mother, I asked you, 'Give me a companion just like myself. It appears that You have given me Rakhal.'"

Thakur enjoys a Hari kirtan at Adhar's house

Thakur has arrived at Adhar's house. Preparations are being made for the kirtan of the musician, Manohar Sai.

A number of devotees and neighbours have come to Adhar's parlour to see Thakur. They all want him to say a few words.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "God's will is both in worldliness and freedom. It is He who has kept you unconscious in worldly life. And again, at His will, when He calls you, you will be liberated. The child has gone out to play – its mother will call at meal-time.

"He will give you the company of sadhus when he wants to grant you liberation. And He will also give you the yearning to attain Him."

A neighbour: "Sir, what kind of yearning?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The yearning that you feel when you lose a job – the way you go from office to office every day to enquire, 'Sir, is there a vacancy?' Yearning brings restlessness: how can I attain God?

"When a dandy twirls his mustache up on the sides, sits cross-legged, and chews betel-leaf nonchalantly, he can't attain God."

Neighbour: "Can you develop such longing by keeping the company of holy people?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, you can. But a hypocrite can't attain such yearning. A kamandalu[1] is with the sadhu all the time that he is visiting the four centres of pilgrimage, but it remains as bitter as it was before."

The kirtan has started now. The goswami sings a song of inner grief.

Radha: "Friend, I am dying! Bring back my Krishna."

Gopi: "O Radha, the dark cloud[2] would have brought rain, but the winds of your pique have blown the cloud away. You aren't happy to see Krishna happy. What causes that pride?"

Radha: "Friend, this pride is not mine. My pride went away with him who makes me proud."

Lalita [speaking a few words on behalf of Radha]: "All of you made me fall in love. Some showed him to me on the

1. A sannyasin's water pot made of bitter gourd.
2. A reference to Krishna.

riverbank or in the open field; Vishakha showed him in a picture."

The goswami says in the song: The companions of Radha begin to look for Krishna near the Radhakunda pool. Then he mentions meeting Sri Krishna in the company of Sridam, Sudama, and Madhumangal; Sri Krishna's conversation with Vrinda, Sri Krishna's conversation with Jatila in the dress of a yogi, Radha giving alms, an astrologer yogi reading Radha's palm and speaking of a coming danger.

The kirtan ends. Sri Ramakrishna talks with the devotees about the preparation for worshipping Katyayani.[1]

The humanity of avatars

Sri Ramakrishna: "The gopis worshipped Katyayani. Everybody is under that Mahamaya, the Primal Power – even the avatars' work is performed taking refuge in maya. That's why they worship the Primal Power. Just look how Rama wept for Sita. 'Bound by the five elements [maya], Brahman weeps.'

"After killing the demon Hiranyaksha, Vishnu incarnated himself as a sow.[2] Having forgotten his real nature, he lived happily as a sow, nursing the young ones. The gods consulted each other and sent Shiva down. Shiva asked the sow, 'Why have you forgotten your real Self?' The sow answered, 'I am quite happy as I am.' Shiva cut open the body of the sow with his trident. Then he [Vishnu] went back to his own abode."

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1. A name of Durga.
2. Braha.

Now Thakur goes from Adhar's house to Ram's and there he listens the story of Uddhava.[1] Kedar and other devotees were present. (See Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Vol. II, Section V).

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with Manirampur and Belgharia devotees

Sri Ramakrishna tells his own story

Sri Ramakrishna is in his room at the Dakshineswar Temple talking to devotees, sometimes standing, sometimes sitting. Today is Sunday, 10 June 1883, the 5th day of the bright fortnight of Jaishtha, the time about ten o'clock. Many devotees are present including Rakhal, M., Latu, Kishori, Ramlal and Hazra.

Thakur is talking about his early days.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "When I was a child, everybody in my native village was fond of me, men and women. They would listen to me sing. And I could also imitate other people's mannerisms. They'd watch and listen to me doing this. The women in their families would set aside snacks for me to eat. Nobody distrusted me. They all looked upon me as a child of their own family.

"But I enjoyed life like a pigeon. I'd visit happy households when I saw them. And I'd run away from a house of pain and sorrow.

"When I found a happy boy or two among my companions, I'd shower great affection on them. With some, I was very friendly. But now they're

1. Uddhava Samvad.

deep in worldliness. Some of them visit here and say, 'My goodness, he's just the same as we saw him in school!'

"Subhankari's arithmetic problems that we studied in school made me giddy. But I could draw pictures and mould clay gods beautifully."

Fondness for charitable houses and for Ramayana and Mahabharata

"Wherever I saw houses where holy men were fed for free, I'd stand there and watch them for a long time.

"I'd sit and listen to the readings from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata wherever I found them narrated. But if the readers were insincere, I'd mimic them before the other people.

"I understood the ways of women rather well. I'd mimic the way they spoke. A child-widow replying to her father, 'I – am – leaving.' The women calling from the verandah: 'O, fisherman!' I could recognize a woman of easy virtue – a widow parting her hair straight in the middle, her body lovingly massaged with oil, little modesty, and her way of sitting is quite different.

"Let's not talk of these worldly things."

Thakur asks Ramlal to sing a song. Ramlal sings:

> Who is the lady dark as a cloud, dancing on the battlefield – like a fresh lily in the sea of blood.

Ramlal now sings Mandodari's grief at the death of Ravana:

O my beloved husband! What have you done? You the beloved, the life-breath of this helpless woman – till she leaves this body, it will find no peace.

He, the Lord of the Golden Kingdom is now lying dead on the ground. How can your wife not be desperate to see this sight?

The God of Death was your slave – you had the power never before seen on earth or in heaven.

She who was most respected among the women of Indra and other gods, that very woman has become a beggar on this earth.

Taking him, the wanderer in the forest, the man with matted hair, as a human being you have lost all.

You did not see anything great in that jewel which Brahma and Shiva, who has taken abode in the cremation ground, yearn for.

Even though you had heard that the stony Ahalya had become a human being by the very touch of Rama.

Sri Ramakrishna overwhelmed with Rama's name – ecstatic love of gopis

As Thakur hears the last song, tears flow from his eyes and he says, "When I was going to the Jhautala to answer the call of nature, I heard the boatmen singing this song. As long I sat there I cried and cried. They held me, and then brought me to my room."

I have heard that Rama is the Saviour Brahman.

Rama with matted hair is not a human being.

Father, did you steal Sita to destroy your own family?

Akrur is taking Sri Krishna to Mathura in a chariot. Seeing him, the gopis hold its wheels tightly in their grip – some of them even lie down in

front of it. They reprimand Akrur, not knowing that Sri Krishna is going of his own accord.

> Don't hold the wheels of the chariot. Does the chariot move on those wheels? Don't hold them, please do not.
>
> Lord Hari Himself moves the wheels – He on whose wheel the whole world moves.
>
> These are not horses. They are magic. The game of love is over today in Gokul.
>
> Why do you find fault unnecessarily with the charioteer? This driver is fully helpless.
>
> Can any chariot move without the will of the master of the chariot?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "What affection, what intense love the milkmaids had! Radha drew a picture of Sri Krishna with her own hands, but she didn't draw his feet lest he'd leave for Mathura.

"I used to sing all these songs often in my childhood. I could sing a whole act of a musical drama. Some people said I was an actor in the Kaliyadaman[1] play."

A devotee with a new chadar has arrived. Rakhal, who has the nature of a child, brings a pair of scissors to cut its loose fringes. Thakur says, "Why are you doing that? Please stop. It looks nice as it is. Brother, how much did it cost?" Foreign-made chadars are cheap. The devotee says, "A rupee and six annas for a pair." Thakur says, "Oh, no! A rupee and six annas for a pair!"

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1. Subjugation of the serpent by the Lord.

After awhile Thakur says to the devotees, "Go and have a dip in the Ganges. Please give him some oil."

When the devotee returns after his dip, Thakur takes a mango from the shelf and gives it to him. He says, "I'm giving him this mango. He has three university degrees. Well, how is your brother now?"

Devotee: "The medicine has helped him. He should be well if he makes some effort."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Can you find a job for him? That would be nice. You would become his patron."

Devotee: "When he gets well, he will have all the opportunities."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with the devotees from Manirampur

Thakur has been sitting for a while on the smaller cot after eating. He has had no time to rest and the devotees have begun to arrive. The first to come is a group from Manirampur. One of them who used to work for P.W.D.[1] is now drawing a pension. This group has been brought by a devotee. Another group of devotees from Belgharia also arrive. Mani Mallick and a few others arrive singly.

The devotees from Manirampur say, "We have disturbed you from your rest."

Sri Ramakrishna says, "No, no. These are rajasic words. People say, 'He is going to sleep now.'"

1. Public Works Department.

Listening to Chanak Manirampur, Thakur is reminded of his childhood friend, Sri Ram. He says, "Sri Ram has a shop in your area. He was my schoolmate in the countryside [Kamarpukur]. He came here the other day."

The devotees from Manirampur say, "Do kindly tell us how to attain God."

Instructions to devotees of Manirampur: practice spiritual disciplines and develop yearning for God

Sri Ramakrishna: "You must practice some spiritual disciplines.

"There is butter in milk, but just saying it won't help you. You have to turn the milk into curd and then churn the curd to get butter. And you need to go into solitude from time to time.[1] Having lived in solitude for some days and attaining love for God, you can live anywhere you like. When you are well shod, you can walk easily across even a thorny path in the forest.

"The main thing is faith. You benefit according to your attitude of mind, but the main thing is faith. Once you have faith, there is no fear."

Devotee from Manirampur: "Do you need a guru?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Many need a guru.[2] But you must have faith in the words of the guru. You

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1. yogī yuñjīta satatamātmānaṁ rahasi sthitaḥ |
   gītā 6-10
   [A yogi should always try to concentrate his mind, living alone in solitude.]
2. ācāryavānpuruṣo veda

succeed only when you take the guru to be God. That's why Vaishnavas say, "Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava [are one].

"You must always repeat the name of God. There is great importance of name in the Kaliyuga. Our life depends on food [which takes a great deal of time and energy to procure]. That's why the practice of yoga is not possible by repeating His name and clapping your hands, the bird of sin flies away.

"The company of the holy is always necessary. The nearer you go to the Ganges, the cooler the breeze you will feel. The nearer you are to the fire, the greater the heat you'll feel.

"Nothing happens by moving slowly to the beat of the drum. Those who desire enjoyment say, 'It'll come – we'll attain God some day or other.'

"I said to Keshab Sen, 'When his son grows insistent, a father will give him his share of inheritance three years early.'

"A mother is cooking food. Her infant is lying nearby. The mother has given him an artificial nipple to suck. When he throws it away and yells and cries, the mother puts down the boiling pot from the stove, takes the infant in her lap and nurses it. I said all this to Keshab.

"They say that in the Kaliyuga you can have the vision of God by weeping for a day and a night.

---

chāndogyopaniṣat 6-14-2
[The need for guru.]

"Demand of God, 'You have created me! You will have to reveal yourself to me!'

"Whether you live in the household or elsewhere, God sees only your mind. A mind attached to worldly things is like a damp matchstick. Strike it any number of times and it won't catch fire. Akalabya learned archery by placing a clay image of Drona, his guru, before him.

"Move forward! A woodcutter, going forward, saw a sandalwood forest, then a mine of silver, farther a gold mine and then even diamonds and other gems.

"An ajnani [man without wisdom] is like a person living in a room made of mud walls. There's not much light inside and he can't see anything outside. But a person who attains Knowledge and then lives a family life is like a person living in a glass house. There is light inside and there is light outside. He can see things both inside the room and out."

Brahman and Mother of the Universe are one and the same

"There is nothing but one. The Supreme Brahman who preserves the 'I' of man is, in the form of Primal Power, the same as He who is creating, preserving and dissolving.

"That which is Brahman is also the Primal Energy. A king said to a yogi, 'You have to give me Knowledge in one word.' The yogi said, 'Yes, you will have it in one word.' After some time a magician suddenly appeared to the king. The king noticed that the magician was waving two of his

fingers round and round, saying, 'King, see this, just see this.' The king looked at him speechless with wonder when, after some time, he notices that the two fingers have become one. The magician says, as he revolves his finger, 'King, see this. See this!' That is to say, Brahman and the Primal Power appear separate from each other at first, but on attaining the knowledge of Brahman, they are no longer two. They are not separate from each other. One and the same. One without a second – non-duality.[1]"

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees from Belgharia

Govinda Mukherji, the head of the Belgharia devotees, has arrived. Thakur had gone into samadhi when he had heard the song 'Awake, awake!' from the musician the day he visited his home. Govinda has brought the same musician now. Thakur is happy to see him and says, "Please sing a few songs."

The musician sings:

1. O Mother, Shyama! Nobody is at fault. I am falling into the well I myself have dug.
2. Yama, don't touch me, since I have lost my caste.

   If you ask me O, Yama how I lost caste, listen.

   I have been turned into a sannyasi by the All-destroying one.

1. Advaita.

(The melody – mooltana)

3. O Mother, wake up, do wake up.

   How long has Kulkundalini been asleep in the Muladhara?

Mother, reach the thousand-petalled lotus in the head where Shiva resides

So that all your work may be done.

O You, the image of consciousness, pierce the six mystic centres and take away my grief.

Sri Ramakrishna: "This song is about piercing the six spiritual centres. God is within and also without. Residing within, He produces the different states of mind. When the six centres are pierced, the individual soul becomes one with the Supreme Soul, leaving behind the realm of maya. This is called vision of God.

"God-vision is not possible unless maya moves aside. Rama, Lakshmana and Sita are walking together. Rama is in front, Sita is in the middle, and behind her is Lakshmana. Because Sita is in the middle, Lakshmana can't see Rama. Similarly, with maya in between, the embodied soul can't see God. (*To Mani Mallick*) But by the grace of God, maya moves aside and leaves the door open. Just as a doorkeeper says, 'If the master orders, I'll let you through the door.'[1]

"The view of the Vedanta and the view of the Purana. The Vedanta says, 'This world is a web of deception.' That is to say, the world is unreal. It's like a dream. But the Puranas or the Bhakti Sastra says that God Himself resides in the universe in the

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1. māmeva ye prapadyante māyāmetāṁ taranti te . gītā 7-14|| [...but they who take refuge in me alone, they cross over this illusion.]

form of twenty-four cosmic principles. Worship Him inside and outside.

"As long as He has kept the consciousness of 'I' in us, all this is real – we can't say it's a dream. When a pot is placed on the fire, lentils, rice, potatoes and vegetables[1] jump up and down. Like they're saying, 'Here I am jumping around.' The body is like the pot, the mind and intellect are like water; sense objects are like lentils, rice, potatoes and vegetables. The I-ness is their sense of ego – it's this 'I' that makes them jump. And Sat-chit-ananda is the fire.

"That's why devotional texts call this world 'the mart of joy.' A song of Ramprasad says, 'This universe is a web of deception.' But another person responded, 'This world is a mart of joy!' A devotee of Kali is liberated in this very life; he is ever full of joy. That devotee sees that He who is God has Himself become maya. It is He who has become the world and all its beings. He sees God, maya, living beings and the world as one. Some devotees see everything permeated with Rama – that everything is the form of Rama. Some devotees see the world permeated with Radha-Krishna, Krishna Himself residing as all the twenty-four cosmic principles. Put on green-tinted glasses and you will see everything green.

"But according to the devotional school of thought, there are different manifestations of God's power. Rama Himself resides everywhere – but at some places there is a greater manifestation than

1. Patal.

other places. He manifests Himself in an incarnation of God in one way and in an embodied-soul in another way. But an incarnation of God has body-consciousness. Assuming a body, maya exercises its jurisdiction – Rama wept for Sita. An incarnation can put a bandage on his eyes at will, like boys playing blindman's bluff. But as soon as the mother calls, the game is over. It's different with ordinary souls. The cloth with which they cover their eyes is tied to their waist with eight knots, with eight bonds.[1] Shame, hatred, fear, pride of caste, pride of ancestry, pride of good conduct, grief and secretiveness are the eight bonds. No one can free you from them but a guru.

Chapter V

Advice to the devotee of Belgharia – petition with a heart full of longing – signs of a genuine devotee

Devotee from Belgharia: "Please grant us your grace."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He resides in all. But you have to send an application to the Gas Company. They will connect you.

"You have to petition with a yearning heart. When three attractions of intense love combine, you can see God – a child's attraction for its mother, a husband's attraction for a chaste wife, and the attraction of possessions for a worldly person.

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1. The Tantric scriptures list eight bonds or fetters: shame (lajja), hatred or contempt (ghrana), fear (bhaya), pride of caste, rank or race (jati), hesitation or suspicion (shanka), secretiveness (jugupsa), pride of family, ancestry, or lineage (kula), and pride of good conduct, character or piety (shila).

"These are signs of a genuine devotee: he listens to the instructions of his guru with a concentrated mind. A python listens to the song of the snake-charmer without moving. But not a cobra. There is another special sign: a real devotee has great power of assimilation. You can't impress images on bare glass – but if you paint it with a black solution, a picture can be impressed on it. Take for example, a photograph. The black solution is devotion or love for God.

"There is another sign. A genuine devotee has complete control over his senses. He has conquered lust. The gopis of Vrindavan had no lust.

"You people are householders. Continue to live a family life. It will even help you in your spiritual practices – like fighting from within a fort. When people practice spiritual disciplines on a dead body,[1] the corpse produces the sound of hun-hun and frightens him. So they should keep rice or roasted gram with them to put in the corpse's mouth every now and then. When the corpse is quiet, it's possible to practice japa uninterruptedly. In the same way you have to keep the members of your family satisfied. Then alone will you be able to practice spiritual disciplines comfortably.

"Those who still have some desire for enjoyment should call on Him while living in the household. Nitai laid down this injunction: 'Cat-fish [magur]

1. A Tantric practice.

soup, the embrace of a young woman[1] and repeating Hari, Hari at the same time.'

"It's different with a person of intense renunciation. A bee sits on nothing but flowers. A chatak bird has water all around but will not sip a drop of it – it keeps its mouth open only for rain water that falls when the star Svati ascends. A true renunciate likes no enjoyment but the bliss of God. A bee sits only on flowers. A real sannyasi, one who has real renunciation, is like a bee. A householder devotee can be likened to a common fly – it sits on sandesh as well as on a festering wound.

"You people have taken so much trouble to come here. You are roaming around in search of God. Most people are satisfied to just see a garden – only very few try to find out who the owner of the garden is. They see the beauty of the world only. They don't look for its creator."

Hatha yoga, raja yoga and the devotee from Belgharia – the six spiritual centres and samadhi

(*Pointing to the musician*) "He has sung about the six spiritual centres. The words pertain to yoga. There is hatha yoga and raja yoga. A hatha yogi practices physical exercises. His ideal is to attain occult powers and a long life. His aim is the eight occult powers. The goal of raja yoga is to develop love for God – ecstatic love for Him – knowledge and non-attachment. Raja yoga is better.

1. Cat-fish soup means tears of devotion from singing God's name; the embrace of a young woman means rolling on the ground in ecstasy.

"The seven planes of the Vedanta and the six centres of the Yoga Sastra are very similar. The first three planes of Yoga are Muladhara, Svadhisthana and Manipura. In these three planes the mind dwells at the anus, the generative organ and the navel. When the mind rises to the fourth plane, that is to say when it reaches the Anahata or heart lotus, the embodied soul has the vision of light, like the flame of a lamp. He exclaims, 'What is this! What is this!'

"When the mind rises to the fifth or throat plane, the person only likes to hear about God. It is the centre of the Vishuddha chakra. The sixth plane between the eyebrows and the Ajna chakra are the same. When the mind reaches there, the person attains the vision of God. But it is like the light within a lantern. You can't touch it because there is a glass between.

"King Janaka used to teach the knowledge of Brahman from the fifth plane. Sometimes he lived on the fifth plane, at other times on the sixth.

"After piercing the sixth centre, the mind reaches the seventh plane, the Sahasrara, and is dissolved. The individual soul and the Supreme soul become one. One attains samadhi. One loses the awareness of the body. There is no outer consciousness left. All the different kinds of knowledge leave – reasoning stops.

"Trailanga Swami said, 'You have the perception of many when you reason – you identify with different kinds of knowledge. After attaining samadhi, at last, one dies within twenty-one days.'

"But you can't attain spiritual consciousness until the Kulkundalini is awakened."

Signs of God-vision

"There are signs of a person who has realized God. Such a person becomes child-like, or like one mad, inanimate, or like an insentient being. He understands rightly that he is an instrument and God is the operator; that it is God who is the doer and he is a non-doer. Just as the Sikhs said, 'It is by His will that even a leaf flutters.' Everything happens by Rama's will – one attains such awareness. A weaver said, 'It is by Rama's will that the cloth is one rupee six annas [per yard]; it is by Rama's will that there was a theft; it is Rama's will that the police took me away [as a suspect], and it is certainly by Rama's will that I have now been released.'"

It is almost evening. Thakur has not rested for even a moment. He has talked continuously about God to the devotees. Now the devotees from Manirampur and Belgharia and the other devotees prostrate to salute him. They go to the temple to visit the deity and then each one returns home.

The goswami ends his kirtan after singing about the meeting of Radha and Krishna.

Section VII

Sri Ramakrishna with Devotees at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Tantrik devotee and worldly life – fear of non-attachment

Sri Ramakrishna rests for awhile after a meal in his room at the Dakshineswar Temple. Adhar and M. arrive and salute him. A Tantrik devotee has also come. Rakhal, Hazra, Ramlal and some others are staying with Thakur these days. It is Sunday, 17 June 1883, 4th of Ashada, the 20th day of the bright fortnight of Jaishtha.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Why can't a person succeed while living a life in the world? But it is very difficult. Janaka and some others lived a worldly life after attaining knowledge. Even so, there is a risk. Even a worldly man who works without attachment has fear. When Janaka saw the Bhairavi, he bent his head down – he hesitated to look at a woman. The Bhairavi said, 'Janaka, I see that you haven't yet attained knowledge – you still see a difference between a man and a woman.'

"Howsoever clever you may be, if you live in a room full of soot, you're sure to dirty your body a little bit with it.

"I've seen a worldly devotee performing worship in silk clothes, and he's in a good mood. The mood lasts till he takes refreshments. Then he returns to his previous self – the same rajas and tamas.

"The sattva guna produces a devotional attitude – but there also is still the sattva of bhakti, the rajas of bhakti and the tamas of bhakti. The sattva of bhakti is pure sattva. With this attitude the mind only goes to God. It remains on the body only to the extent that is required for preserving the body."

A paramahamsa is beyond the three gunas and beyond the fruit of karma – also beyond sin and virtue – Keshab Sen and his group

"A paramahamsa is beyond the three gunas.[1] The three gunas, though within him, are almost non-existent. He's like a child, not subject to them. That's why a paramahamsa lets young children come around – to adopt their attitude.

"A paramahamsa cannot save for the future. This is not for householders – they have to save for their families."

The Tantrik Devotee: "Is a paramahamsa conscious of sin and virtue?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Keshab Sen asked me the same question. I said to him, 'If I tell you more, your organization will break up.' Keshab said, 'Then please say no more, sir.'

"What is sin and what is virtue? In the state of a paramahamsa, a person sees that it is God Himself who grants good behavior – and also bad. There are sweet as well as bitter fruits. Some trees bear sweet

1. And he who serves me with an unswerving devotion, he, going beyond the gunas, is fit for becoming Brahman. Bhagavad Gita 14:26.

fruits, others bitter or sour. He has created the tree of sweet mangoes as well as sour hog-plum.[1]"

The Tantrik Devotee: "That's true, sir. You see rose fields on the hills – as far as the eye can see."

Sri Ramakrishna: "A paramahamsa sees that it is all the splendour of His maya: real and unreal, good and bad, sin and virtue. But this is a very advanced stage. In this stage a person can't maintain an organization."

Tantrik devotee and fruit of karma – sin and virtue – sin and responsibility

Tantrik Devotee: "But doesn't a person have to reap the fruit of his action?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's true. The result of good acts is good. And the result of bad actions bring bad results. Don't you feel the bite of chillies when you eat them? All this is God's lila, His play."

Tantrik Devotee: "What is the way for us? Every action bears fruit, doesn't it?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Let it be. It's different for devotees of God."

Saying this, he sings:

O mind, you do not know how to farm

The field of your life lies fallow; were you to cultivate it, you would reap a golden harvest.

Fence it around with Kali's name, and your crop will not be harmed.

That fence of the Mother with long flowing hair is strong indeed: not even Death himself dares come near.

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1. Amra.

Not today or in a hundred years will your crops be snatched away.

Work now, O mind, to reap your harvest to the full. Sow the seed, your guru's gift,[1] and shower it with the water of love.

If you cannot do so by yourself, take Ramprasad along.

He sings another song:

The path of Yama (God of Death) is barred.

The doubt of my mind has also gone.

O brother, at the nine gates of my house, four Shivas stand guard. The house stands on one pillar and is tied with three ropes.[2]

Sreenath sits on the thousand-petalled lotus in the head, giving fearlessness.

"Whether a brahmin or a prostitute dies in Kashi, he or she will become Shiva.

"When the eyes are filled with tears at the mention of Hari, or Kali, or Rama, ritualistic devotions[3] are no longer needed. All work falls away. The fruit of action does not touch him."

Thakur sings another song.

Love is born of contemplation.

One's gain depends on one's faith. Faith is the basis.

If the mind remains submerged in the nectar of the sea of the feet of Mother Kali,

There is no longer any need of puja, homa, yajna and so on.

Thakur sings another song –

1. Mantra.
2. The pillar is Brahman, the ropes are the three gunas.
3. Sandhya (thrice-performed worship and meditation) and protective mystic words.

Of what use are rituals for one who utters Kali's name at dawn and noon and dusk? Worship itself will follow in his footsteps, never catching up.

Why go to Gaya, Ganges, Prabhas, Kashi, or Kanchi, if I can breathe my last chanting Kali's name?[1]

"When the mind gets absorbed in God, bad or sinful tendencies do not survive."

The Tantrik Devotee: "But you have said that the 'I of knowledge' remains."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The 'I of knowledge', the 'I of the devotee', the 'I of a servant' are the good 'I's,' which remain. The rascal 'I' flees." (*Laughter*.)

The Tantrik Devotee: "Sir, many of our doubts have been resolved."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Upon attaining the vision of Atman, all doubts flee."

Tantrik devotee and tamas of bhakti – hollow doubts – eight occult powers

"Develop the tamas of bhakti. Say, 'What! I have repeated the name of Rama? I have repeated the name of Kali? What bondage have I? What fruit of action is there for me?' "

Thakur sings another song.

Mother, can I but die with Durga's name upon my lips, I shall see, O Shankari, how in the end you cannot refuse to rescue me.

Should I have killed a brahmin or a cow, or destroyed a child in the womb, or indulged in drink, or slain a woman,

For all those heinous deeds I care not in the least; still may I aspire to Brahman.

1. For complete song, refer Volume IV, Section XVIII.

Sri Ramakrishna adds: "Faith! Faith! Faith! The Guru has said that it is Rama who resides in every form, 'The same Rama lies in every being.' A dog is going away with bread in its mouth. The devotee says, 'O Rama! Stop, let me butter your bread.' One must have such faith in the words of the Guru.

"Hollow people have no faith. They are always in doubt. As long as you have not realized the Self doubt doesn't leave you.[1]

"Pure love for God is devotion without any desires. You attain Him quickly through this love.

"Occult powers such as *anima*[2] are all desires. Krishna said to Arjuna, 'My dear, if you have any occult power like *anima* you cannot attain God. You may only become more powerful.'"

The Tantrik Devotee: "Sir, why don't the Tantrik rituals bear fruit these days?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Because they're not done perfectly or not done with love and devotion for God. That's why they don't bear fruit."

While ending his talk Thakur now says, "Bhakti indeed is the essence. The genuine devotee has no fear, no feelings of anxiety. The Mother knows all. The cat holds the mouse in one way but its own kitten in quite another."

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1. bhidyate hṛdayagranthiśchidyante sarvasaṁśayāḥ,
kṣīyante cāsya karmāṇi tasmin dṛṣṭe parāvare । muṇḍakopaniṣad 2-2-8
[The knot of the heart gets untied, all doubts become solved, and all one's actions become dissipated.]
2. The power to become as small as an atom.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal, M. and other devotees at Balaram's house

Today Sri Ramakrishna visits Balaram in Calcutta. M. is sitting close to him. Rakhal is also here. Thakur has entered into an ecstatic mood. It is Monday, 25 June 1883, the 5th day of the dark fortnight of Jaishtha, 12th day of Ashada, time about 5 o'clock.

Sri Ramakrishna (*in an abstracted mood*): "Look here, if you seek with a yearning heart, you can have a vision of your true Self. But the more the desire for sense enjoyment remains, the more that vision is obscured."

M.: "As you say, sir, you have to take a leap."

Sri Ramakrishna (*joyfully*): "That's it!"

Everybody remains silent. Thakur continues to speak.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Look, everybody can realize the Self."

M.: "But, sir, God is the doer. He does differently with different people. In the case of some, he awakens their consciousness. But in the case of others, He keeps them in ignorance."

Realization of one's own real Self – the way to realize God, or the Self – earnest prayer – union of the Absolute and phenomenal world

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, no. You must pray to Him with a yearning heart. When you are sincere, He is bound to listen to your prayer."

A Devotee: "True, sir – because there is 'I,' you have to pray."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "You go to the Absolute by holding on to the phenomenal, step by step – like going up to the roof by stairs. After realizing the Absolute, you must come back down to the phenomenal and live there loving God in the company of devotees. This is the surest way.

"God has numerous forms, many games: He plays as the Lord, as deities, as man, and as the world. He takes the form of a human being in every age as an incarnation of God, to teach mankind love and devotion. Just think of Chaitanya Deva. You can taste and appreciate God's love only through an incarnation of God. Infinite is His divine sport, but we need love and devotion. We need only the milk. And that comes through the udders of a cow. The incarnation of God is the udder."

Is Thakur saying that he has come down as an incarnation himself? That just by seeing him, you see God? Is Thakur hinting about himself by referring to Chaitanya Deva?

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna in different moods at Dakshineswar and in the house of a devotee

Sri Ramakrishna is at the Dakshineswar Temple sitting on the steps of the Shiva temples in the month of June 1883. It is very hot. The evening will set in soon. M. has come with ice, etc. After saluting Thakur, he sits down on a step of the Shiva temple just below Thakur's feet.

John Stuart Mill and Sri Ramakrishna: limitations of man – a conditioned being

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "The husband of Mani Mallick's granddaughter came here. He has read in some book[1] that God doesn't appear to be all-knowing or wise. If He were, why is there so much misery? And an embodied being dies – why not let him die all at once? Why cause him to die slowly and with such great trouble? The author of the book has gone so far as to say that he could have created a better world."

M. listens to Thakur with his mouth agape, without saying anything. Thakur continues.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Can God be understood? Sometimes even I think of Him as good and sometimes as bad. He's kept us in the domain of delusion.[2] Sometimes He keeps us in the state of awareness and sometimes in unconsciousness. For a short time this ignorance disappears, but then it envelops us again. If you throw a piece of stone in a pond covered with algae, you see water for a minute – but very soon the water is covered by the algae again.

"As long as you have body-consciousness, you are subject to pleasure and pain, birth and death, disease and sorrow. They all belong to the body – not to the Atman. Maybe God takes you to a better place when the body dies. It's like the birth of a child after labour pains. Realizing the Self,

1. John Stuart Mill's Autobiography. Mill; 1806-1873
2. His Mahamaya.

happiness and sorrow, birth and death, appear like a dream.

"What can we understand? Can you put ten seers of milk in a pot that has the capacity for one seer? A salt doll that goes to fathom the sea never returns to tell its depth. It's dissolved and becomes one with the sea.

All doubts are solved, all actions are dissipated

It is evening. Arati is being performed for the deities. Sri Ramakrishna, seated on the small cot in his room, is meditating on the Mother of the Universe. Rakhal, Latu, Ramlal, Kishori Gupta and some other devotees are there. M. is going to stay here for the night.

Thakur now talks to a devotee alone on the small verandah north of his room. He says, "It's good to meditate before dawn and then late at night; and also every day at twilight." He is talking about how to meditate on God with form and on the Impersonal Reality.

A little later Thakur sits on the semi-circular verandah to the west. It is about 9 p.m. M. is sitting near him. Rakhal and the others go back and forth between the verandah and the room.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Look, all doubts will be removed from those who come here. What do you think?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

At a distance a man is singing while he rows his boat on the bosom of the Ganges. The sweet sound of the song passing through the infinite sky and touching the bosom of the Ganges sounds to Thakur

like the anahata sound.[1] He immediately goes into ecstasy – his whole body horripilated. Holding M.'s hands he says, "Look, my hair is standing on end. Pass your hand over my body."

M. is speechless to feel the body horripilated with love. 'The body horripilated': The Upanishads say that Brahman fills the entire universe and ether. Has the same Brahman touched Sri Ramakrishna in the form of sound? Is he Sound[2] Brahman?[3]

After awhile, Thakur resumes the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna: "All those who come here have good tendencies from past lives.[4] What do you say?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Adhar must have good tendencies."

M.: "That goes without saying."

Sri Ramakrishna: "A person who is guileless realizes God quickly. There are two paths – good, toward God, and bad, toward the world. He should take the good path toward Reality."

M.: "Yes, sir. If there is the least fibre on a thread, it can't enter the eye of a needle."

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1. The sound of creation; Om, the unstruck sound.
2. Shabda.
3. etasminnu khalvakṣare gārgyākāśa otaśca protaśceti |
bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣat 3-8-11
[By this Immutable, O Gargi, is the ether pervaded.]
śabdaḥ khe pauruṣaṁ nṛṣu
gītā 7-8
[[I am] sound in Akasha, and manhood in men.]
4. Samskaras.

Why complete renunciation?

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you find a hair in your food, you have to spit out everything you have in your mouth."

M.: "But as you said: those who have realized God aren't harmed by the world – even a whole banana plant is consumed by the blazing fire of knowledge."

Sri Ramakrishna and Kavikankan –songs of the Chandi at Adhar's house

Thakur has come to Adhar's house in Benetola in Calcutta another day. Saturday, 14 July 1883, the 10th day of the bright fortnight of Ashada. Adhar is going to have Rajnarayan chant the Chandi for Thakur. Rakhal, M. and some other devotees are with Thakur. The recitation will be in the worship hall. Rajnarayan begins:

I have surrendered myself at the fearless feet of the Divine Mother. Am I afraid of Yama any more?

I have tied tuft of hair on the top of my head to the almighty mantra of Kali's name.

Having sold my body in the mart of the world, I have bought the name of Durga.

I have planted the wish-fulfilling tree of Kali's name in my heart,

This time when Yama comes, I will open my heart to him. This is my resolve,

The six wicked beings in the body I have driven out.

I have cried, 'Victory to Durga, to great Durga!' and have thus ended my journey.

Hearing only a part of it, Thakur is entranced and stands up. He sings along with the group of musicians.

Thakur adds his own line to the song, "O Mother, save me, O Mother!" As he does, he becomes absorbed in samadhi – unconscious of the outside world. Motionless, he stands there. The musicians continue:

> Who is this Woman who lights the battlefield?
>
> Her body is like a dark storm cloud. And Her teeth flash like lightening.
>
> Her hair is disheveled and She runs about fearlessly among the gods and the demons.
>
> She destroys the demons with terrible laughter on Her face. Thus She flashes like lightening in battle.
>
> The drops of diligence falling on Her body of red lotuses look beautiful!
>
> Beholding Her Sea of Beauty, the moon has shed its lustre.
>
> Is it possible that Shiva, who enthralls the Universe, is lying at Her feet as though dead?
>
> Kamalakanta wonders who this Woman with the gait of an elephant can be.[1]

Thakur again goes into samadhi.

When the music ends, he goes from the worship hall to Adhar's parlour on the second level and sits down with the devotees. The conversation is on different aspects of spirituality. Some devotees' emotion flows unseen as in the case of the Phalgu river – there is no sign of any internal emotion on the surface. The conversation continues in this way.

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1. Volume II, Section XX.

Chapter IV

Talk about God-realization at Balaram's house – the aim of life

Yet on another day, Saturday, 18 August 1883, the 2nd day of Bhadra, Thakur comes to Balaram's house in the afternoon. He explains the doctrine of divine incarnation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "An incarnation of God takes on a body to teach mankind love for God. It's like climbing up and down the stairs after reaching the roof. Other people tread the path of devotion to reach the roof until they have attained knowledge, until they're free of desires. You can reach the roof only when you're free from all desire. A shopkeeper doesn't go to bed till he's set his accounts right – he sleeps only after his balances tally in the ledger.

(*To M.*) "If you take a plunge, you're bound to succeed – you're bound to be successful if you make the jump.

"Well, what do you think of the service performed by Keshab Sen, Shivanath and the other Brahmos?"

M.: "Sir, it's just as you say: they only describe the garden – they don't talk much about seeing the master of the garden. They start by describing the garden, and also end there."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's right! The main thing is to look for the owner of the garden, and to talk to him. The only aim of life is to realize God."[1]

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1. ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyo

Thakur has now gone from Balaram's house to Adhar's. He chants God's name and dances in Adhar's parlour after dusk. Vaishnavcharan, the professional singer, is singing. Adhar, M., Rakhal and others are present.

Joy of singing at Adhar's house – Thakur's advice to him

After the singing, Thakur sits absorbed with emotion. He says to Rakhal, "The spiritual feeling here is not like rainfall in the month of Shravana when it rains heavily and then just as quickly stops. Here, Shiva springs up from the bowels of the earth, though he has not been installed by human hands. The other day you left Dakshineswar in a huff. I prayed to the Divine Mother not to mind your bad mood."

Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation of God? Is he Shiva?

And then in an ecstatic mood he says to Adhar, "I say, brother. Meditate on the name you were just chanting."

Saying this, he touches Adhar's tongue with his finger and writes something on it.

Has Adhar been initiated?

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bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣat 2-4-5
[The Self, my dear [Maitreyi] should be realized – should be heard of, reflected on and meditated on.]

Chapter V

Primal Power and the doctrine of incarnation

Yet on another day Thakur is sitting on the steps of the southeastern verandah of his room at the Dakshineswar Temple. With him are Rakhal, M. and Hazra. In a jocular mood Thakur mentions several things about his childhood.

Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi at Dakshineswar – he converses with the Mother of the Universe

Thakur is in samadhi. It is evening. He is sitting alone on the smaller cot in his room and is talking to the Mother of the Universe. He says, "Mother, why do You create such confusion? Should I go there, Mother? If You take me, I'll go."

> There was talk about Thakur's visit to a devotee's house. Is he speaking like that to get the permission of the Mother of the Universe?

Sri Ramakrishna again talks to the Mother of the Universe. It seems that he is praying to Her for a devotee of his inner circle. He says, "Mother, please make him stainless. Why have you given him only one part[1] of divine power?"

He is silent for awhile. Then he says, "O yes, I see. It will be enough for Your work."

> Is this what Thakur is saying: Out of sixteen kalas, one kala of Your power will be enough for Your work, for teaching humanity?

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1. Kala.

Now in an ecstatic mood, Thakur talks to M. and the others about the Primal Power and the meaning of the incarnation of God.

"That which is Brahman is also Power,[1] which I call Mother. When It is inactive I call It Brahman and when It creates, preserves and dissolves, I call It Power. It's like still water and water with ripples in it. An incarnation of God is the play of Power. He comes to teach love and devotion to God. An incarnation is like the udder of a cow. You can only get milk from the udders.

"God manifests Himself as a human being – like fish collect in a hole."

Some devotees wonder if Sri Ramakrishna is a God-man like Sri Krishna, Chaitanya Deva and Christ.

1. Shakti.

Section VIII

Adhar's House – Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal, Ishan and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Childlike faith – the untouchables and Shankaracharya – heart of a sadhu

Sri Ramakrishna has kindly visited Adhar's house in Calcutta. He is sitting in the parlour. It is afternoon. Rakhal, Adhar, M., Ishan[1] and several people from the neighbourhood are present.

Thakur is fond of Ishan Mukherji. He was a Superintendent in the Accountant General's Office. After retiring he took to meditation and charitable work. One day Thakur went to his house on the Macchuabazar Street and had his meal there, with devotees. Ishan had invited a number of guests. (See Part I). Thakur stayed almost the whole day. Narendra was expected, but couldn't come.

Since retiring, Ishan has visited Thakur at Dakshineswar often and gone to a solitary spot on the bank of the Ganges in Bhatpara to meditate. Now he

1. All of Ishan's sons were very well-educated. The eldest, Gopal, was a District Magistrate. The middle, Satish Chandra, was a District Judge. Satish was a classmate of Narendra. He could play the pakhavaj beautifully. He was a government servant in Gazipur. It was at his house that Narendra stayed during his pravajya state [period of sannyasa wandering] and met Pavhari Baba. One of the brothers, Girish, had worked as Assistant Registrar at Calcutta University for a long time. Ishan gave so much in charity that at the end of his life he became a debtor and suffered great difficulties. His wife died many years before his own death.

is going to perform Gayatri purashcharana in Bhatpara.

Today is Saturday, 22 September 1883, the 6th day of Aswin.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "Please tell that story of yours – about the boy who sent a letter."

Ishan (*smiling*): "A boy heard that God had created us. So he wrote a letter to God as a prayer and mailed it in a post box. The address he gave was Heaven." (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Did you notice the story? You can only succeed in spiritual life with childlike faith.[1] (*To Ishan*) And that story about the renunciation of work."

Ishan: "After realizing God, all ritualistic devotion like sandhya drops off. One day everybody was performing devotions on the bank of the Ganges, everybody but one person. When asked, he said, 'I'm observing impurity.[2] I can't perform rituals. I've had both the defilements of death and birth – the death of Mother Ignorance and the birth of Self-knowledge.[3]

Sri Ramakrishna: "And now that story – about caste discrimination falling off by attaining Self-realization."

Ishan: "Acharya Shankara was going up the steps in Kashi after a bath in the Ganges. Seeing an untouchable with some dogs in front of him, he

1. The kingdom of heaven is revealed unto babes, but is hidden from the wise and the prudent. Bible.
2. Ashoucha.
3. Atmarama.

said, 'Hey, you touched me!' The pariah said, 'Master, neither have you touched me nor have I touched you. The Atman within all is not touched by anything.' Is there any difference between the sun's reflection in wine and in the water of the Ganges?" [1]

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "And next the story about the harmony of religions – that God can be realized by any path."[2]

Ishan (*laughing*): "Both Hari and Hara come from the same root. The only difference is inflection.[3] He who is Hari is also Hara. It's only a question of faith.[4]"

Sri Ramakrishna: "And also that story about the heart of a sadhu being the biggest of all."

Ishan (*smiling*): "The earth is the biggest thing we see. But the sea is even bigger – and the sky bigger than the sea! But Lord Vishnu has authority over all – heaven, the mortal world and the nether world – all three worlds in a single foot. That foot of Vishnu is in the sadhu's heart. So the sadhu's heart is the biggest of all."

The devotees thoroughly enjoy listening to these words.

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1. Bhagavad Gita 6:29.
2. Bhagavad Gita 4:11.
3. The word *pratyaya* has two meanings: faith and inflection. This is a pun meaning that if you have faith in God it doesn't matter who you worship.
4. Hari is a name of God according to followers of Vishnu, Hara of Shiva.

Chapter II

The worship of the Primal Power is the worship of Brahman – Brahman and the Primal Power are the same

Identity of God the Absolute and God the creator, preserver and destroyer

Ishan is going to perform Gayatri purashcharana in Bhatpara. Gayatri is the mantra of Brahman. Until a person is completely rid of worldly attractions, he does not attain the knowledge of Brahman. But a worldly mind cannot be gotten rid of since life depends on food in the age of Kali. It is always concerned with the senses[1] of sight, taste, smell, touch and sound. That is why Sri Ramakrishna says, "It is not possible to live by the Vedic tenets in the Kaliyuga." That which is Brahman is also Shakti, the power. When worshipping power, one is worshipping Brahman. When there is creation, preservation and destruction, it is called Shakti – they are not different, they are the same."

The quest of the Absolute and Ishan – the Vedantist position, 'I am He,' So 'ham

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "Why do you roam around with neti-neti [not this, not this] on your lips? Nothing can be said about Brahman – only that it exists, "asti mātram,"[2] only Rama.

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1. Bhagavad Gita 12:5.

2. naiva vācā na manasā prāptuṁ śakyo na cakṣuṣā ,
astīti bruvato'nyatra kathaṁ tadupalabhyate .
astītyevopalabdhavyastattvabhāvena cobhayoḥ ,
astītyevopalabdhasya tattvabhāvaḥ prasīdati .
kaṭhopaniṣad 2-3-12, 2-3-13
[It cannot be attained through speech, nor through mind, nor through eye. How can It be known to anyone apart from him who speaks of It as existing? The Self is (first) to be realized as existing,

"Whatever we see or think is the manifestation of the same Primal Power, the Primal Consciousness[1] – creation, preservation and dissolution, the world and living beings. Also meditation, he who meditates, love for God, ecstatic love for God – all these are manifestations of that Primal Power.

"But Brahman and Shakti are inseparable. Hanuman sang a hymn of praise for Rama when he returned from Lanka. He sang, 'O Rama, You are the Supreme Brahman[2] and Sita is Your Shakti. You are one and the same.' Like a snake and its zigzag movement. The moment you think of the movement of a snake, the snake comes to your mind. And when you think of a snake, you think of its movement. As soon as you think of milk, you think of its colour, its whiteness. And as soon as you think of milky whiteness, you think of milk. As soon as you think of wetness, you think of water. And, as soon as you think of water, you have to think of its wetness.

"This very Primal Power, or Mahamaya, covers Brahman. As soon as the veil is removed you realize, 'I am You and You are I.'

"As long as there is the covering of Mahamaya, cherishing the Vedantist attitude of So 'ham, 'I am indeed that Supreme Brahman,' is not correct. Waves belong to water, water does not belong to

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and then as It really is. Of these two, the real nature of the Self that has been known as merely existing, becomes favourably disposed for the self-revelation.]

1. Chitshakti.
2. Parabrahman.

waves. As long as there is the veil, it is good to call God, 'Ma, Ma – You are my Mother, I am Your child.' 'You are my Lord, I am Your servant.' The attitude of master and servant is also good. All other attitudes, such as serenity, friendship etc. – follow from this attitude. If a master has affection for his servant, he may say to him, 'Come, sit beside me. You and I are not different.' But if the servant sits beside the master of his own accord, won't the master be cross?"

The Primal Power, the play of the incarnation of God – and Ishan – what is maya? The harmony of the Vedas, the Puranas and the Tantras

"As for the play of an incarnation of God, it is all the manifestation of the power of Consciousness. He who is Brahman is also Rama, Krishna and Shiva."

Ishan: "Hari and Hara come from the same root. They are only distinguished in inflection." (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, except for the One, nothing exists. The Vedas say, 'Om Sat-chit-ananda Brahman.' The Puranas says, 'Om Sat-chit-ananda Krishna.' And the Tantra says, 'Om Sat-chit-ananda Shiva.'

"This very Consciousness in the form of Mahamaya keeps everyone in ignorance. The *Adhyatma Ramayana* says, 'All the rishis who saw Rama just said only this, 'O Rama, don't enchant us with Your world-bewitching maya![1]'"

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1. ajñānenāvṛtaṁ jñānaṁ tena muhyanti jantavaḥ
gītā 5-15

Ishan: "What is maya?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Everything that you see, hear or think is all maya. If you have to say so in a word, 'lust and greed' constitute the veil of maya.

"There's nothing wrong in chewing betel-nut, eating fish, having a smoke or massaging the body with oil. What is the use of only giving these up? Giving up 'lust and greed' is the one thing necessary. Giving them up is true renunciation. Householders should now and then retire into solitude and practice spiritual disciplines. After developing love for God through them, they can renounce mentally. Sannyasis should renounce both within and without."

Keshab Chandra Sen and renunciation – Navavidhan and doctrine of the Formless – dogmatism

"I said to Keshab Sen, 'How can a person suffering from delirium be cured if he lives in a room where there's a pitcher of water and tamarind pickles? You have to go into solitude now and then."

A Devotee: "Sir, how about Navavidhan – it seems to me like a mix[1] of five kinds of lentils."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Some people say it's modern. But I ask myself, 'Is the God of the Brahmos a

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[Knowledge is enveloped in ignorance, hence do beings get deluded.]
daivī hyeṣā guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayā ।
māmeva ye prapadyante māyāmetāṁ taranti te ।।
gītā 7-14
[Verily, this divine illusion of Mine, constituted of the gunas, is difficult to cross over. Those who devote themselves to Me alone, cross over this illusion.]
1. Khichuri.

different God?' They call their cult Navavidhan, the new dispensation. That may be so. Just as there are six systems of philosophy. Maybe this is like them.

"But, you know where the believers of the formless God are mistaken? When they say that God is formless and all other views are wrong.

"I know that God is both with form and without form – and much more beyond that. God can be everything.[1]"

God in the untouchables

(*To Ishan*) "The same Consciousness, the same power of Ignorance,[2] has become the twenty-four cosmic principles.[3] One day when I was meditating, my mind entered Rasik's house. He is a scavenger. I said to my mind, 'Stay, stay here, you rascal!' The Divine Mother showed me that all the members of his household were the same containers and have the same kulkundalini inside and the same six centers.

"Is the Primal Power male or female? In the countryside [Kamarpukur], I saw Kali being worshipped in the house of the Lahas. She was wearing a sacred thread around Her neck. Somebody asked, 'Why a sacred thread around the

1. nānto'sti mama divyānāṁ vibhūtīnāṁ parantapa ।
gītā 10-40.
[There is no end of My divine attributes, O scorcher of foes.]
2. Mahamaya.
3. mahābhūtānyahaṅkāro buddhiravyaktameva ca,
indriyāṇi daśaikaṁ ca pañca cendriyagocarāḥ.
gītā 13-6
[The great elements, egoism, intellect, as also the Unmanifested, the ten senses and the one (mind), and the five objects of the senses.]

Mother's neck?' The master of the house, said, 'Brother, you have understood the Mother. But I don't know whether She is male or female.[1]'

"It's said that the Mahamaya once swallowed Shiva. When her six centers were awakened, Shiva emerged out of Her thigh. Then He [Shiva] created the Tantra philosophy.

"You have to take refuge in that Chitshakti, that Mahamaya."

Ishan: "Please shower your grace on me."

Advice to Ishan – dive deep – need of a guru – brahmin pundit – Ishan and scriptures – mere book-learning

Sri Ramakrishna: "Pray with a guileless mind, 'O Lord, reveal Yourself to me!' Weep! Say, 'O Lord, please take my mind off 'lust and greed!"

"And dive. Can you reach the jewels by swimming on the surface of the water? You have to dive deep.

"Get the information from your guru about where to search. A person was looking for a special stone image of Shiva.[2] Somebody came along and

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1. tadvā etadakṣaraṁ gārgyadṛṣṭaṁ dṛṣṭṛ, aśrutaṁ śrotṛ, amataṁ mantṛ, avijñātaṁ vijñātṛ, nānyadato'sti dṛṣṭṛ, nānyadato'sti śrotṛ, nānyadato'sti mantṛ, nānyadato'sti vijñātṛ, etasminnu khalvakṣare gārgyākāśa otaśca protaśceti.

bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 3-8-11

[O Gargi, this Immutable, is never seen but is the Witness. It is never heard, but is the Hearer. It is never thought, but is the Thinker. It is never known, but is the Knower. There is no other witness but This, no other hearer but This, no other thinker but This, no other knower but This. By this Immutable, O Gargi, is the ether pervaded.]

2. Vanalinga, a particularly-shaped stone found in nature.

said, 'Go near that stream and you will find a tree. Close to the tree is a whirlpool. You will have to dive at that spot. Then you will find the stone image.' You have to get instruction from the guru where to search."

Ishan: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Sat-chit-ananda Himself comes as the Guru.[1] If someone receives initiation from a human guru and regards the guru as a mere man, he will not succeed. He will have to regard the guru as God Himself. Only then will he have faith in the mantra. And faith does bring everything. Eklavya (a low caste boy) made a clay image of Drona and then learned archery standing in the forest before the image. He worshipped the clay Drona as Dronacharya himself. Thus, through that faith, he perfected himself in archery.

"And don't bother too much with brahmin pundits. They're always after money.

"I've seen brahmins who'd come to perform ceremonies – reading the Chandi or some other scripture – turning over many of the pages without reading. (*All laugh.*)

"A nail knife[2] is enough to kill yourself, but to kill others you need such weapons as a sword and a shield. That's the purpose of the scriptures.

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1. pitāsi lokasya carācarasya tvamasya pūjyaśca gururgarīyān
gītā 11-43
[You are the Father of the world, moving and unmoving; the object of its worship; greater than the great.]
2. Naharni.

"You don't need many scriptures.[1] If you don't have discrimination, mere scholarship won't help. Even the study of the six philosophies is of no avail. Go in solitude and weep for Him, call upon Him. He will certainly do everything for you."

Practicing spiritual disciplines in seclusion – concern for cleanliness and Ishan

Ishan is building a hut with eight thatched roofs on the bank of the Ganges in Bhatpara to perform purashcharana. Thakur has heard about it.

Sri Ramakrishna (*impatiently, to Ishan*): "Oh yes, is the hut ready? The fact is that the less people know about such activities, the better. People of sattvic nature meditate in their minds or in a forest or some solitary place. Sometimes they even meditate inside a mosquito net."

Sometimes Ishan takes Hazra to Bhatpara with him. Hazra is always concerned about outward purity. Sri Ramakrishna has asked him not to behave like that.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "Well, don't involve yourself with undue concern about outward purity. A sadhu felt very thirsty. A man with a water-skin passed his way. He offered water to the sadhu. The sadhu asked, 'Is your container clean?'[2] The man

---

1. uttamā tattvacintaiva madhyamaṁ śāstracintanam ।
adhamā mantracintā ca tīrthabhrāntyadhamādhamā ।।
maitreyī upaniṣat 2-21
[To meditate upon the Reality is the best, to meditate upon the scriptures is placed in the middle, to meditate upon the mantra is inferior and to wander about in the places of pilgrimage inferior than the inferior.]

2. navadvāramalasrāvaṁ sadā kāle svabhāvajam ।
durgandhaṁ durmalopetaṁ spṛṣṭvā snānaṁ vidhīyate ।।

said, 'Sir, it is very clean, but in yours is a lot of urine and excreta. So I say, drink water from my skin. It won't cause any harm.' Your skin, i.e. your body, your stomach, contains filth.

"And believe in God's name. Then you won't need to go on pilgrimages."

Saying this and overwhelmed with emotion, Thakur begins to sing.

Renunciation of rituals in the stage of perfection

Why go to Gaya, Ganges, Prabhas, Kashi, or Kanchi, if I can breathe my last chanting Kali's name?

Of what use are rituals for one who utters Kali's name at dawn and noon and dusk? Worship itself will follow in his footsteps, never catching up.

Charity, vows, and almsgiving no longer appeal to Madan's mind. His worship alone is surrender at the Mother's blessed feet.

Lord Shiva Himself, the God of Gods, with all His powers, sings Her praises. Who, then, can conceive of the power of Her holy name?

Ishan remains silent.

Advice to Ishan; childlike faith – first practicing spiritual disciplines like Janaka, then God-realization in the world

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "If you still have any doubts lurking inside, please ask me."

Ishan: "Sir, you talked about faith."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's only through true faith that you can realize Him. It happens sooner if you

---

maitreyī upaniṣat 2-6

have full faith. If a cow is choosy about her fodder, she yields less milk. If she grazes on all kinds of grasses and leaves, she yields more milk.

"Rajakrishna Bannerji's son told a story: A person received a command from God to see his ideal deity in a ram. He believed it. God exists in all.

"A guru said to his disciple, 'It is Rama who resides in every being.' The devotee put his full faith in this. When he saw a dog running away with a chapatti in its mouth, the devotee ran after it with butter in a container, shouting, 'Rama, wait a minute! Let me butter your chapatti.'

"Oh, what faith Krishnakishore had. He would say that by reciting, 'Om Krishna, Om Rama,' you earn the result of millions of sandhyas.

"Also Krishnakishore would say to me in my ear secretly, 'Please don't tell anybody that I don't like sandhya and other rituals anymore.'

"I also feel the same way. The Divine Mother reveals to me that She has become everything. Once when I was coming back from the Jhautala towards the Panchavati after easing myself, I saw a dog following me. I stopped at the Panchavati and said to myself, 'Maybe the Mother is going to say something through it.'

"So, as you said just now, a person attains everything by faith."[1]

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1. sarvadharmānparityajya māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja,
ahaṁ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣyayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ.
gītā 18-66

Difficult problems of the householder and the Lord's grace

Ishan: "But I am a householder."

Sri Ramakrishna: "So what? By His grace, even the impossible becomes possible.[1] Ramprasad sang, 'This world is a veil of deception.' Somebody replied to him by way of another song:

> This world is indeed a thing of joy; let me eat and drink and be merry.
>
> King Janaka, the great royal sage, was he inferior in any respect to a holy man who has given up the world?
>
> Oh no, it was he who was loyal to both matter and Spirit, who realized God and at the same time drank his cup of milk.

"But first you have to practice spiritual disciplines secretly, in seclusion. Then you can live in the world and become a King Janaka. But if you don't, how can you be like him?

"Just see, Kartika, Ganesha, Lakshmi, Saraswati, are all there, but Shiva is sometimes lost in samadhi. And sometimes he dances, chanting 'Rama, Rama.'"

[Relinquishing all dharmas take refuge in Me alone; I will liberate you from all sins; grieve not.]

1. With man it is impossible, but nothing is impossible with the Lord – Christ.

Section IX

At Dakshineswar with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room at the Dakshineswar Temple with the devotees. Rakhal, M., Ram and some other devotees are present. Hazra is outside on the verandah. Today is Sunday, 23 September 1883, the 7th day of the dark fortnight of the month of Bhadra.

Nityagopal, Tarak and a few other devotees are staying at Ram's house. He treats them with great affection and regard.

Sometimes Rakhal stays with Adhar Sen. Nityagopal is always absorbed in a spiritual mood. Tarak's mind is also indrawn – he does not talk to people very much these days.

Sri Ramakrishna's worry about Narendra

Thakur is now talking about Narendra.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to a certain devotee*): "Narendra doesn't like even you. (*To M.*) Why? Why didn't he come to Adhar's house?

"There are so many qualities all in the one person, Narendra. Singing, playing instruments, studying. The other day when he was in Captain's carriage, Captain asked him so many times to sit next to him. But Narendra sat on the other side and didn't even look at Captain."

Pundit Gauri, a Shakta, and Sri Ramakrishna

"What is the use of mere learning? Practice of spiritual disciplines are what is necessary. Gauri Pundit of Indesh was a spiritual seeker – and a scholar. Sometimes he would become absorbed in the ecstasy of the Divine Mother, now and then chanting [a Vedic hymn to the Mother], '*Ha re, re, re. Niralamba lambodar janani kam yami sharan.*' The other pundits would sit there like earthworms. I also would become overcome with emotion. Seeing me eat, he would ask whether I'd practiced spiritual disciplines with a bhairavi.

"Gauri was enraged to hear that a follower of the Kartabhaja sect described the formless aspect of God,[1] i.e. the shape[2] of water.[3]

"At first he was a bigoted Shakta. He would pick up a tulasi leaf with two sticks[4] – he wouldn't touch it. (*Everybody laugh.*) Then he went home. When he returned, he didn't behave like this.

"I planted a tulasi plant in front of the Kali Temple. It died. It is said that tulasi plants don't grow where goats are sacrificed.

"Gauri used to give very nice interpretations. He would say, 'O this!' explaining, 'O disciple! This is your ideal deity.' He would say that the ten heads of Ravana are the ten senses.[5] Kumbhakarana was a man of tamas, Ravana of rajas, and Bibhishana of

1. Nirakara: Sanskrit word for the Formless God.
2. Akara.
3. Neer.
4. A bigoted worshipper disdains anything to do with any other sect. Tulsi leaves are sacred to Vishnu.
5. The 10 indriyas: 5 sense organs and 5 organs of action.

sattva. That's why Bibhishana was blessed by Rama."

Ram, Tarak and Nityagopal

Thakur is resting for awhile after his midday meal. Ram, Tarak [later Swami Shivananda] and some other devotees arrive from Calcutta. Having saluted Thakur, they sit on the floor. M. is also sitting on the floor. Ram says, "We're learning to play the mridanga.[1]"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ram*): "Has Nityagopal learned to play?"

Ram: "No, he plays it just a little bit."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What about Tarak?"

Ram: "He plays a good deal."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Then he wouldn't sit so downcast, with his eyes on the ground. "If you give your mind to something else, it doesn't dwell on God that much."

Ram: "I've been learning the drum only to play kirtan."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Are you learning to sing."

M. (*smiling*): "No sir, not exactly. I just hum like a drone."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Have you learned the song, 'I have no use for knowledge or reason. Only make me mad in Your love?' My attitude is exactly this."

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1. An earthen drum.

Hazra shows malice toward some.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ram and other devotees*): "In Kamarpukur I used to visit one house almost every day. The boys were my age. They came here the other day and stayed for two or three days. Their mother used to dislike everybody, like Hazra. One day her foot was dislocated and gangrene set in. The room smelled so bad nobody could enter it. So I said to Hazra, 'Don't find fault with other people.'"

It is now about four o'clock. Thakur goes to the Jhautala slowly for a wash. A cotton carpet has been spread on the verandah southeast of Thakur's room. He will sit there when he returns from the Jhautala. Ram and others are present. Adhar Sen belongs to the caste of goldsmiths. Ram Babu comments that Rakhal had eaten at his house. Adhar is a great devotee. This is the topic of conversation.

A devotee jokes about the disposition of some of the goldsmiths. He said they like to eat bread with dry roasted vegetables. It doesn't matter if they have anything else to eat. They eat high quality rice, and they must have fruit as snacks. They like hog plum. If they receive hilsa fish[1] or sandesh as a present from someone, they send the same to the father-in-law of their daughter or son. Who would send the same present to his own daughter or son's father-in-law? In this way one hilsa fish would be eaten in fifteen to twenty houses. The women do all the work, but the cooking is done by a brahmin from Orissa. He spends an hour or two in every home. Sometimes one Oriya brahmin cooks at four

1. A delicacy of West Bengal.

or five places. Thakur laughs but offers no opinion of his own.

Thakur in samadhi – he talks to the Mother of the Universe

It is evening. While standing in the northwestern corner of the courtyard, Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi. After a long time his external awareness returns. What an amazing state Thakur is in. These days he almost always remains absorbed in samadhi. The slightest suggestion can make him unconscious of the outside world. When devotees come, he talks for awhile; otherwise he remains absorbed within. He cannot attend to worship, japa or any ritual.

Sri Ramakrishna in the state in which one cannot perform work of any kind

Coming out of samadhi, Thakur remains standing and talks with the Mother of the Universe. He says, "Mother, worship has left me and also japa.[1] Look Mother, don't make me so inert. Let my attitude be that of a servant of God. Mother, I should be able to talk, and chant Your name, and sing. And please, Mother, give some strength to this body so I can walk a little on my own. And be able to go to all the places where they talk about You and where Your devotees are."

This morning Sri Ramakrishna came to the Kali temple and offered flowers at the feet of the Mother of the Universe. Now he is talking to her.

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1. yastvātmaratireva syādātmatṛptaśca mānavaḥ ।
ātmanyeva ca santuṣṭastasya kāryaṁ na vidyate ।।
gītā 3-17
[But the man who is devoted to the Self, and is satisfied with the Self, and content in the Self alone, has no obligatory duty.]

Sri Ramakrishna says, "Mother, this morning I offered a few flowers at Your feet. I thought I had done well and that my mind was going to external worship. But Mother, why did this happen? Why are You making me inert again?"

It is the seventh day of the dark fortnight of Bhadra. The moon has not yet appeared. It is a dark night. Sri Ramakrishna remains in ecstasy. He returns to his room and sits on the small cot in his room, still abstracted. And he talks again to the Mother of the Universe.

Advice to Ishan – Vedic injunctions don't suit the Kaliyuga – carry out spiritual practice taking God as Mother

He seems to be talking to the Divine Mother about the devotees. He is talking about Ishan Mukherji. Ishan had said, "I'll go to Bhatpara and practice the Gayatri *purashcharana.*[1]" Sri Ramakrishna had said to him that Vedic injunctions did not suit the Kaliyuga because people have to work hard for food, are short lived and their body and sense consciousness can't be completely given up. He asked Ishan to carry out spiritual disciplines according to the Tantras instead, in the filial attitude. And he also said, "The Mother is none other than Brahman and Brahman is also the Primal Power."

Absorbed in ecstasy Thakur now says, "What, the Gayatri purashcharana! Leaping from this thatched roof to another … Who has told him this?

1. The repetition of japa, increasing and decreasing the number according to the moon.

Is he doing it himself? … Well, let him do a little purashcharana."

(*To M.*) "Well! Is this all real, or fancies of my mind?"

M. is amazed watching Thakur talking to the Mother of the Universe in this way. He is speechless. God is very near to us. He is both outside and inside us. If that is not so, how can Sri Ramakrishna talk with Him in whispers?[1]

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal and other devotees at Dakshineswar

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the platform in front of the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. He is seeing the Mother of the Universe in the image of Kali. M. and other devotees are sitting near him. It is 26 September today, 1883, the 10th day of the dark fortnight of Bhadra. It is afternoon.

A short time ago, Thakur had said, "No calculation can be made about God. His glory is boundless. What can man say in words? An ant went to a sugar hill and ate a grain. Its stomach was filled. Then it thought to itself, The next time I come, I'll bring the whole hill into my hole.

"Is it possible to understand Him? That's why my attitude is like a kitten's. The mother cat can keep it

1. tadviṣṇoḥ paramaṁ padaṁ sadā paśyanti sūrayaḥ divīva cakṣurātatam ।
ṛgaveda saṁhitā 1-23-20
[Just as the eye perceives the universe in the vast expanse of the sky, the illumined souls too have the clear perception of that supreme state of Vishnu, the all-pervading Reality.]

anywhere and it doesn't care. A little child doesn't know all the riches of its mother."

Sri Ramakrishna sings while he sits on the platform of the Kali temple, "O Mother, O Mother, You, the embodiment of Omkar. Mother, how much these people talk. I understand nothing, Mother. I know nothing. I take refuge in You, in You I take refuge! I pray only that I may have pure love at Your lotus feet. Please do not bewitch me with Your world-enchanting maya, Mother. I take refuge in You, in You I take refuge."

The arati is over in the temples. Sri Ramakrishna is seated on the small cot in his room. Mahendra squats on the floor.

Earlier Mahendra[1] was a regular visitor to Keshab Sen's Brahmo Samaj. Since meeting Thakur, he doesn't go there any more. Sri Ramakrishna is always talking with the Mother of the Universe. Mahendra becomes speechless to see it. He is charmed by hearing about the harmony of religions and Thakur's yearning for God.

Mahendra has been visiting Thakur for almost two years. Not only does he have his darshan, he is also blessed by his grace. Thakur is always telling him and the other devotees that God is both formless and also with form, that He takes up a form for the sake of the devotee. To those who believe in God without form, he says, "Please stick to your belief. But you must remember that everything is possible for Him. He can be both with form and formless, and so much besides."

1. M., who used many names for himself, to humbly hide himself.

Sri Ramakrishna and Mahendra – God with form and formless – sense of duty – for the devotee, the world of spiritual ignorance is the pain of death

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahendra*): "You have held faith in one, the formless God?"

Mahendra: "Yes, sir. But as you say, everything is possible. Forms of God are also possible."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Beautiful. And remember that He is residing in the world of both animate and inanimate in the form of consciousness."

Mahendra: "I think of Him as the Consciousness of the conscious."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Stick to this attitude for the time being. There's no need to strain and change your attitude. Gradually you will know that He Himself is consciousness and that consciousness is His consciousness only. He is the very nature of consciousness.

"Well, are you attracted by money and power?"

Mahendra: "No. But, for the sake of contentment [freedom from worry]. I want to meditate on God without anxiety."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's only natural."

Mahendra: "Greed? No, I don't have that."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, that's all right. But who will look after your children? If you feel that you are not the doer, who will provide for your children and others?"

Mahendra: "I've heard that as long as there is the sense of duty, you can't attain knowledge. Duty is the burning sun!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Live in this state of mind now. It will be different later when the sense of duty leaves you by itself."

Everybody is quiet for awhile.

Mahendra: "If you have partial knowledge in worldly life, it's like death in full consciousness – like cholera."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Rama! Rama!"

If a person has awareness at the time of death from cholera, he suffers great pain. Perhaps this is what Mahendra is referring to: the world of ignorance is like a forest fire. Maybe that's why Thakur exclaimed, "Rama, Rama."

Mahendra: "Other people are like delirious patients. They go into a state of unconsciousness and don't feel the pain of death."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Look, what good is money anyway? Jaygopal Sen has so much money, but he's not happy because his sons aren't obedient."

Mahendra: "Is poverty the only suffering in this world? We have six enemies. Add to it disease and grief."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And then name and fame – the desire to earn a name.

"Well! What do you think about the state I'm in?"

Mahendra: "The state in which one finds oneself on waking up. You are ever united with God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you see me in dream?"

Mahendra: "Yes, sir. Many times."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How? Do you see me giving instruction?"

Mahendra doesn't reply.

Sri Ramakrishna: "If you see me giving instruction, know that it is Sat-chit-ananda."

Then Mahendra tells him everything that he had seen in dream. Sri Ramakrishna listens attentively.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahendra*): "This is very good. Don't reason any more. You are a Shakta."

Section X

Sri Ramakrishna at the Durga Puja Festival at Adhar's House

Chapter I

Today is Navami Puja day, Wednesday, 10 October 1883, the 25th day of Aswin. Adhar is celebrating the Durga Puja festival at his house and has invited Thakur to it. Sri Ramakrishna is standing in the worship Hall**,** watching the arati of Sri Durga.

Sri Ramakrishna has come with devotees, including Balaram's father and Sarada Babu, a retired school inspector and a friend of Adhar. Adhar has invited his neighbours and relatives for the occasion. Quite a number of them have come.

Sri Ramakrishna stands, in ecstasy, after watching the evening arati. Absorbed, he sings to the Divine Mother.

Adhar is a householder devotee. Many householder devotees present have been scalded by the three fires of the world.[1]

Perhaps that is why Sri Ramakrishna sings a hymn of praise to the Mother of the Universe for the welfare of all.

O Mother, O Redeemer, take me across quickly this time.

I am dying in fear of the God of Death.[2]

O, Mother of the Universe, preserver and enchantress of the world, and its begetter.

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1. Three kinds of affliction: spiritual, material and supernatural.
2. Yama.

You took birth from Yashoda's womb, emerging as the Lord's divine sport.

In Vrindavan as Radha You sported and enjoyed Yourself with Krishna, the beloved of Vraja.

Full of sweetness, You took delight and participated in the dance of divine sport.

You are Shiva's consort; You are the Mother, the heartthrob of Govinda. You dwell in the heart and bestow salvation.

You are eternal. You are Ishani, ever full of bliss; You assume all forms; You have attributes and yet You are attributeless. You are ever the beloved of Shiva. Who can fathom Your greatness?

Sri Ramakrishna talks with the Mother of the Universe in an ecstatic mood

Sri Ramakrishna goes to Adhar's parlour on the second floor and sits down. Many invited guests are there. Balaram's father, Sarada Babu and others sit near him.

Still absorbed in ecstasy, Thakur says to the guests, "Gentlemen, I have eaten. Go now and enjoy the feast."

The Divine Mother has accepted Adhar's offering. Is it because of this that Sri Ramakrishna is saying to the Mother of the Universe, in an ecstatic mood, "I have eaten. Now, you people should eat the sacramental food." Still absorbed in ecstasy, Thakur says to Her, "Should I eat, Mother, or will You eat? O Mother, the image of divine bliss!"

Is Sri Ramakrishna seeing the Mother of the Universe and himself as one? Has the Divine Mother incarnated in this world as a son to instruct mankind? Is this why Thakur says, "I have eaten?"

In a state of ecstasy, he sees the six spiritual centres in his body and the Mother seated in them.

Absorbed, he sings:

You have enchanted the whole world, O Mother. You, the enchantress of Shiva Himself.

O Mother, sitting on the great lotus in the Muladhara, You enjoy Yourself, playing the vina.[1]

In the machine of a human body, You manifest Yourself. With Your great mantra, You pierce the three gunas which reside in the three spiritual nerves[2] – the Sushumna, Ida and Pingla.

You provide energy to the three musical scales.

You abide in the six-petalled lotus of Svadhisthana as Bhairava musical mode.[3]

You illuminate as Mallhar[4] raga in the Manipura and as the Vasanta[5] raga in the lotus of the heart.

You reside as Hindola musical mode in the Vishuddha chakra, and in the Ajna lotus as eardrum. You pierce the seventy-three melodies with the three octaves: keynote, metre and tempo.

O Mahamaya, you easily bind all creatures with the net of infatuation.

You become absorbed in the Supreme Consciousness and establish there as lightning.

Nanda Kumar says: who knows for certain what Your essence is? But sing like the cuckoo and Your essence is the three gunas – sattva, rajas and tamas.

He sings again:

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1. A stringed musical instrument.
2. Nadis.
3. Raga.
4. Indian musical mode of rainy season.
5. An Indian musical mode.

What more can I reason? I am already dead, reasoning and reasoning.

How did She take a black complexion, She whose name dispels the fear of death, and She who has Mahakala lying at Her feet.

There are so many forms of black, but this blackness is really amazing – it illumes the lotus of my heart when contemplated there.

She who is called Kali is blacker than black.

One who has seen this form of Hers but once likes no other form.

Prasad says in delight, "Where is such a woman that by merely hearing her name – without seeing Her – the mind is at once absorbed."

Taking refuge in the Fearless One, all fear is dispelled. Perhaps it is for this reason that Thakur is dispensing fearlessness to the devotees by singing this song.

I have surrendered myself at the Fearless feet of the Divine Mother. Am I afraid of Yama any more?

I have planted the wish-fulfilling tree of Kali's name in my heart.

Having sold my body in the marketplace of the world, I have bought the name of Durga.

I have cast from me my six unflagging foes.[1]

This time when Yama comes, I'll open my heart to him. This is my resolve.

The name of Tara, the Essence of Essences, I have tied to the top tuft of my hair.

Say Ramprasad: I have cried "Durga!" and am ready for the journey.

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1. The six passions: Lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride and envy.

Sarada Babu is mourning the death of his son. That's why his friend Adhar has brought him to Thakur. Sarada Babu is a devotee of Gauranga. At his sight, Sri Ramakrishna is inspired with the feeling of Gauranga. Thakur sings:

Why has my body turn fair? (for complete song see Section 19, Chapter 4 of Vol. IV of this title).

Now he sings, inspired with the feeling of Gauranga. He said that Sarada Babu was very fond of the song:

Surely Gauranga would be in ecstasy.

How else would he who is the treasure house of ecstasy be?

He laughs, weeps and dances, charged with divine feeling.

Seeing a forest, he thinks of Vrindavan. Seeing the sea, he thinks it the Jamuna.

He who has Krishna within and Gaur without surely will know ecstasy.

Gaur sobs and weeps. He holds his own feet and says:

Where are you, Radha, full of the ecstasy of love?

And he sings:

O Mother! The neighbours raise a scandal, they cast aspersions on me because of Gaur.

How shall I explain and to whom, O the friend of my heart? I am dying of shame.

One day Gaur was performing the kirtan round the city with his troupe.

Shouting, Hari Bol, Hari Bol, he went through Nadia's bazaar.

Accompanying them, I saw his two red-hued holy feet.

One day, there was noise and bustle of the kirtan in the house of Srivas.

The moon-faced Gaur rolled in ecstasy in Srivas' courtyard.

I stood aside, hiding myself in a corner.

I fell in a swoon and the wife of Srivas brought me to consciousness.

One day, the moon-faced Gaur was standing on the bank of the Ganges,

The moon and the sun both shone on Gaur's body.

Seeing the beautiful image of Gaur, both Shaktas and Shaivites were entranced.

Suddenly my water-pot fell and the husband's sister, that gossip, saw it.

M. muses: Balaram's father is a Vaishnava. Is it for this reason that Ramakrishna is singing the mad love song of the gopis and Sri Krishna?

O Friend, I have not found my Shyam within my reach.

Can I live happily at home? Had Shyam been the hair of my head, I would have made a braid with Bakul flowers entwined.

Had Shyam been a bracelet, he would always be around my arm.

O friend, I would have walked along shaking my arm for show.

I would have gone on the main road, wearing that bracelet of Shyam.

When Shyam plays his flute, I come to the Jamuna to fetch water.

And I look all around like a shy she-deer.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna on the harmony of religions – conversation with Balaram's father

Balaram's father has estates in Bhadrak and other places in Orissa and has built guest houses and temples for the service of the deities in Vrindavan, Puri, Bhadrak and other places for the service of the deities. During the last part of his life, he devotes himself to Shyamasundar Kunj [Krishna] in Vrindavan.

Balaram's father is an old Vaishnava. Many Vaishnava devotees have no sympathy for the views of Shaktas, Shaivites and Vedantists. Some of them even have malicious attitudes toward them. But Sri Ramakrishna does not like such a narrow-minded opinion. He says that you can realize God by all paths, all beliefs, if you have longing in your heart. Many Vaishnava devotees outwardly tell beads and recite the scriptures, but they have no yearning for God-realization. Perhaps that's why Thakur is advising Balaram's father.

His earlier story – Sri Ramakrishna wears the habit of Vaishnava hermits and is initiated with Rama mantra

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "I thought, why should I walk on a single track? I also took up the habits of a Vaishnava recluse in Vrindavan. I followed this attitude for three days. Then I was initiated with the Rama mantra at Dakshineswar – I had Vaishnava mark on my forehead and wore a diamond around my neck. After a few days I put them all away.

Advice to Balaram's father – God with attributes and the attributeless – God with form and formless

"A man had a tub. People took their clothes to him to be dyed. The tub was full of a solution of dye, but the clothes would take whatever colour the people wanted by being dipped in the same liquid. Someone was speechless to see this and said to the dyer, 'Please give me the dye you are using.'"

Is Thakur saying that people from all religions will go to him to be awakened spiritually?

Sri Ramakrishna adds, "A chameleon lived on a tree. One person saw that it was green, another black, and another saw it yellow. Different people saw it in different colours. They talked about it, one saying that the animal was green. Another said, 'No, it is red.' 'No, no,' another said, 'It is yellow.' And they began to quarrel. Then all these fellows went to a person who was sitting under the tree. He said, 'I live under this tree day and night. I know that it is a chameleon. It changes its colour often. And sometimes it has no colour at all.' "

Is Sri Ramakrishna saying that God is with qualities, and that He assumes various forms? And again, that He is without qualities – He has no colour, He is beyond mind and speech? And that the sweetness of God can be tasted on all paths – bhakti yoga as well as jnana yoga?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Balaram's father*): "Don't read any more books. You can read devotional scriptures, like the life of Chaitanya.[1]"

1. *Chaitanya Charitamrita.*

The significance of the play of Radha-Krishna – sweetness and the taster of sweetness – the one thing needful

"There is nothing more to it than this: to love Him and to taste His sweetness. He is sweetness, the devotee is the taster – it is the devotee who drinks the sweetness. He is a lotus and the devotee is the bee. The devotee drinks the honey of the lotus.

"Just as a devotee can't live without the Lord, the Lord can't live without a devotee. In that case, the devotee is the sweetness and the Lord its taster. The devotee is the lotus and the Lord a bee. To enjoy His sweetness God becomes two, which is the reason for the divine play of Radha-Krishna."

Advice to Balaram's father: How long do holy duties like visiting places of pilgrimage, wearing a string of beads and religious habit last?

"In the beginning a person should go on pilgrimage, wear a string of beads and practice rituals. But after attaining the goal, after realizing God, outer display gradually decreases. Then there is only living with God's name – remembering and meditating on it.[1]

"Sixteen rupees are a lot of paise. But when sixteen rupees are put together it doesn't look like much of a heap. When they are turned into one gold piece, how small they become. And when you buy a diamond for it, people hardly notice it."[2]

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1. Bhagavad Gita 3:17.
2. Bible, Matthew 13:45-46: A merchant sold all he had, closed his business, and bought a pearl of great price.

Vaishnavas criticize people who don't wear outer signs like rosaries around their necks. Is this why Thakur is saying that after God-realization, a devotee doesn't have any need for religious rosaries and clothes? When you attain the real thing, the outer observances decrease?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Balaram's father*): "The Kartabhajas talk about beginners, practioners, perfected ones and the perfected among the perfect. A beginner puts a vermilion mark on his forehead, wears a rosary around his neck and practices outer rituals. Practioners don't observe as much outer conduct – for example, the bauls. The perfected is one who has firm faith that God exists. The perfected among the perfect are like Chaitanya Deva. They have realized God and are always communicating with Him. The perfected of the perfect are called Sai. There is no one beyond Sai."

Advice to Balaram's father – sattvic spiritual disciplines – harmony of all religions and giving up fanaticism

"There are different kinds of spiritual seekers. Sattvic spiritual disciplines are practiced secretly – the aspirant practices in seclusion. He looks like an average person, but he meditates inside a mosquito net.

"A rajasic aspirant indulges in outward show. He wears a rosary around his neck, puts on ochre clothes, a silk dhoti, and his rosary is interspersed with gold beads. This is like sitting outside with a signboard."

Vaishnava devotees do not have much faith in Vedanta or Shaktism. Thakur is instructing

Balaram's father to shake off such narrow-mindedness.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Balaram's father and others*): "Whatever the religion, whatever the belief, everyone calls upon the same God. So you mustn't look down upon or criticize any religion or belief. The Vedas call God Sat-chit-ananda Brahman. The Bhagavata and other Puranas call Him Sat-chit-ananda Krishna. The Tantras call Him Sat-chit-ananda Shiva – the same one Sat-chit-ananda.

"Vaishnavas have different sects. That which is called Brahman in the Vedas is called Alekh-Niranjan by one of their sects. Alekh means that which is not noticeable, cannot be seen through the senses. They say that Radha and Krishna are two parts of the same Alekh.

"In Vedanta there is no incarnation of God. Vedantists say, 'Rama and Krishna are two waves of Sat-chit-ananda.'

"There are no two, only One. Whatever one may call God, if it is from the bottom of his heart, it will surely reach Him – it is yearning which brings it about."

Sri Ramakrishna is absorbed in ecstasy while he says all this to the devotees. Now he regains outer awareness and says, "Are you Balaram's father?"

Advice to Balaram's father – yearn for God

They are all quiet for awhile. Balaram's old father counts the beads of his Harinam rosary silently.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M. and others*): "Well, these people chant His name so much, go on pilgrimage

so often. Then why are they like this? For them a year has eighteen months.

"I said to Harish, 'What's the use of going to Kashi if you have no yearning? If you have yearning, Kashi is right here.'

"Why don't they succeed even after visiting so many holy places and repeating the name so much? They have no yearning. If you call Him with longing, He reveals Himself.

"Before a yatra [theatrical performance] begins, there is so much noise everywhere. You can't see Sri Krishna then. Later, when Rishi Narada comes to Vrindavan with a longing heart, playing on his vina and saying, 'My life-breath! My Govinda, my soul!' Krishna doesn't delay anymore. He appears with the cowherd boys and says, 'Stop, O white cow. Stop.'"

Section XI

The Lakshmi Full Moon Festival of the Bright Fortnight of Aswin at Dakshineswar

Chapter I

Thakur with Rakhal, Balaram's father, Beni Pal, M., Mani Mallick, Ishan, Kishori Gupta and others

Today is Tuesday, 16 October 1883, 30th day of Aswin. Balaram's father and some other devotees are here. Balaram's father is a great Vaishnava. He continuously chants the name of Hari with his rosary.

Strict Vaishnavas do not like people of other sects very much. Balaram's father, on the other hand, sometimes visits Sri Ramakrishna – his attitude is different from other Vaishnavas.

Sri Ramakrishna: "People who have open minds accept all deities: Krishna, Kali, Shiva, Rama and so on."

Balaram's Father: "Yes, one husband in different dress."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But there is also something called single-minded devotion.[1] When the milkmaids went to Mathura and saw Krishna wearing a turban, they drew down their veils and said, 'Who is this man? Where is our yellow-robed Krishna with a crest of peacock feathers?'

1. Nishtha bhakti.

"Hanuman also had single-minded devotion. When he came to Dwaraka in the Davapar yuga, Krishna said to Rukmini, 'Hanuman won't be happy unless he sees Rama's form.' So he assumed the form of Rama."

Amazing state of Sri Ramakrishna – union of the temporal and the Absolute

"What do I know, brother? I'm in this state when I descend from the Absolute to the phenomenal, and then I return to the Absolute.

"Experiencing the Absolute is called Knowledge of Brahman. It is very difficult. Unless you're completely rid of worldly attachment, you can't succeed. When Bhagavati took birth in the house of Himalaya, She appeared before Her father in many forms.'[1] Himalaya said, 'Mother, I want to see Brahman.' Bhagavati said to him, 'Father, if that is what you desire, you'll have to associate with sadhus.' You'll have to keep the company of the holy and live in solitude from time to time, leaving behind your worldly activities.

"The One has produced many – the phenomenal comes from the Absolute. In a particular state of consciousness, 'many' vanishes. Then even 'one' also disappears, for if there is one, there is also two. It is beyond all comparison. You can't describe It with any analogy. It's not darkness and light. It's not the light that we see. That light is not material light.[2]

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1. Devi Bhagavata, 7th Skanda, chapters 31, and 35 to 36.
2. tacchubhraṁ jyotiṣāṁ jyotistadyadātmavido viduḥ
   muṇḍakopaniṣad 2-2-9
   [It is pure, and is the light of lights, It is that which the knowers of the Self realize.]

"And when God changes the state of mind, when He brings the mind down to the phenomenal world, I see that He Himself has become the Lord, maya, the individual soul and the world.[1]"

God is the doer – You and yours

"And sometimes He reveals to me that He has created all creatures and the world. Just think of a garden and its proprietor. He is the Doer, and the whole of this world and all its creatures belong to Him – this is spiritual knowledge. And to say, 'I am the doer, I am the guru, I am the father' is ignorance. The whole house and the family is mine, and also wealth and people – this is ignorance."

Balaram's Father: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "As long as you don't realize that God is the Doer, you will have to return to the world again and again – you will be born again. When you realize that He is the Doer, you won't be born into this life again.

"As long as you do not say, 'Tuhun, Tuhun [only You],' He will not liberate you. You will die and be born again and again and you will not attain liberation. So what's the use in saying, 'My and mine?' The servant of a proprietor says, 'That's our garden. This is my cot.' But when the proprietor dismisses him, he can't even carry away his mango-wood box.

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1. tvaṁ jāto bhavasi viśvatomukhaḥ
śvetāśvataropaniṣad 4-3
[Taking birth, You have Your faces everywhere.]

"'Me and mine' has veiled the Reality and doesn't allow you to perceive it."

The knowledge of non-duality and vision of pure consciousness

"Without the knowledge of non-duality, you can't perceive pure consciousness.[1] Only after realizing pure consciousness itself is there eternal bliss.[2] The state of paramahamsa is one of eternal bliss.

"There are no incarnations of God according to the Vedanta school of thought. According to it, Chaitanya Deva was only a bubble of non-dual consciousness.

"What is the perception of pure consciousness? Like sudden light in a dark room when a match is struck."

Incarnation is a jewel of a man

"In the path of bhakti, or love, one believes in incarnations of God. When a woman of the sect[3] saw the state I was in, she said, 'Father, you have realized the truth within. Don't dance so much. Grapes should be preserved carefully, in cotton.' When a woman conceives, her mother-in-law gradually decreases her work. A sign of God-realization is that the person's duties slowly drop off. There is a jewel of a man inside this person.

"When I ate, the Kartabhaja woman said, 'Father, are you eating or feeding someone else?'

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1. Chaitanya.
2. Nityananda.
3. Kartabhaja.

"This feeling of 'I' hides the Reality. Narendra said, 'The more this "I" disappears, the more His "I" will appear.' Kedar says, 'The more clay there is in a pot, the less water is in it.'

"Krishna said to Arjuna, 'Brother, if you have even one occult power, you will not find Me.' You may gain some power, such as witchcraft[1] or healing, and they may do some good to people. What do you say? So I prayed to the Divine Mother to grant me pure love – I didn't ask for occult powers."

Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi when he is saying this to Balaram's father, Benipal, M., Mani Mallick and others. He sits there like a picture, outwardly unconscious.

When his samadhi is over, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing:

I have not found Him, friend, for whom I have gone mad.

Now he asks Ramlal to sing. Ramlal begins with a song about Gauranga's renunciation.

What an exquisite bright form of Sri Gauranga – his eyes streaming with the tears of love – did I see in Keshab Bharati's hut!

Gauranga dances mad, like an elephant. He sings and then rolls in the dust, tears streaming from his eyes.

He calls on Hari, weeping, piercing the mortal world and heavens with his thundering voice.

Then he prays repeatedly for liberation as a slave of God, with a straw between his teeth and palms joined together.

He wears the robe of a yogi, his locks of hair shaved.

1. Gutika siddhi.

One's heart cries to see him so charged with ecstatic love for God.[1]

Having renounced all, he has come to distribute it to all, overwhelmed as he is by the sorrows of mankind.

Premdas wishes to wander from door to door like a slave at the feet of Sri Chaitanya.

After singing about Chaitanya Deva's madness in ecstatic love, and with a hint from Thakur, Ramlal sings of the intoxicated state of the milkmaids:

Don't hold it, don't. Does a chariot move because of its wheels?

Hari is the master of this wheel – His will alone make the world move.

And then he sings:

What value is the colour of a cloud holding fresh water?

In comparison to it, the beauty of the moon of Shyam (Krishna) with flute in hand and a smile on his lips illumines the three worlds.

Chapter II

The untouchable caste becomes pure by Hari's name

Sri Ramakrishna: "When you develop love for Hari, you don't distinguish between castes." (*To Mani Mallick*): "Please tell that story about Tulsidas."

Mani Mallick: "A chatak bird is dying of thirst. It has the Ganges, the Jamuna, the Saraju and many other rivers and lakes, but it won't drink from any of these. It only waits with its mouth open

1. Prema.

for the rain drops of the svati constellation of stars."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's to say, only devotion for His lotus feet is the real thing, everything else is illusion."

Problem of untouchables – the untouchable is purified by the name of Hari

Mani Mallick: "There's something else, too, that Tulsidas said. By touching the philosopher's stone, the eight metals turn into gold. In the same way all castes, even a pariah, becomes pure by repeating Hari's name. As well, without the name of Hari, all four castes – brahmin, kshatriya, vaishnava and shudra – become impure like a tanner of hides."

Sri Ramakrishna: "A hide which is not supposed to be touched can be taken into the temple when it is tanned.

"A man is purified by God's name. That's why you should practice chanting God's name. I said to Jadu Mallick's mother, 'At the time of death, the worries of the world invade the mind – worries about the family, sons, children, writing out a will – come to mind. The thought of God will not come.' The remedy is to practice chanting and singing His name. If you do this, only His name will come to the lips at the time of death. When a bird is caught by a cat, it only squawks – 'Rama, Rama' doesn't come to it.

"You have to prepare for the time of death. Repeat His name and meditate on Him in solitude for the rest of your life. If an elephant is taken to

the stable after a bath, it won't get dirty again by mud and dust."

Balaram's father, Mani Mallick and Beni Pal are all aged. Is this why Thakur is instructing them like this, especially for their good?

Addressing the devotees, Sri Ramakrishna speaks again.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why do I ask you to meditate on Him and repeat His name in solitude? Living day and night in the world brings restlessness. Just see how brother kills brother and becomes a murderer for only one yard of land. The Sikhs say, 'All the confusion and lack of peace in the world are because of land, wife and money.'"

Ramachandra, the world and Yoga Vaishishtha – the mart of joy

"You're a family man, but what is the danger in that? When Rama said he'd renounce the world, Dasharatha [Rama's father] was very worried and he asked Vaishishtha's advice. Vaishishtha said to Rama, 'Rama, why do you want to renounce the world? Let's talk about it. Is the world without God? So what will you renounce and what will you take? Except for Him, nothing exists. He appears [or reveals Himself] in the form of 'the Lord, maya, individual souls and the universe.'"

Balaram's Father: "Very difficult!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "During the time of spiritual practice, the world is a snare. But when you've attained knowledge, when you've had His vision, the world becomes 'a mart of joy.'"

Seeing God in an incarnation – Chaitanya Deva, an incarnation of God

"The Vaishnava scriptures say, 'You meet Krishna by faith. Reasoning takes you far away from Him. Faith, faith alone!'

"What faith Krishnakishore had! In Vrindavan a low-caste man drew water from a well for him. He said to the man, 'Just say Shiva.' As soon as he had repeated the name of Shiva, Krishnakishore drank the water. He used to say, 'You have chanted the name of God. Why should you buy repentance by paying money? What's this?'

"Seeing people offer tulsi leaves to cure diseases, Krishnakishore was amazed.

"When someone mentioned his going to see a sadhu, Haladhari said, 'Why should I go see a case built of the five elements?' Very angry, Krishnakishore reported, 'Haladhari said this! He doesn't know that the body of the sadhu is made of Consciousness.'

"At the bathing ghat of the Kali Temple he said to us, 'Please bless me that I may pass my days repeating Rama's name.'

"Whenever I went to Krishnakishore's house, he would dance when he saw me.

"Rama said to Lakshmana, 'Brother, wherever you find burning love for God, know that I am there.'

"For example, Chaitanya Deva. He laughed, wept, danced and sang with ecstatic love for God.

Chaitanya Deva was a divine incarnation, God in human form."

Sri Ramakrishna sings:

Sri Gauranga, a treasure of ecstasy. In ecstasy he laughs, weeps, dances, sings and cries.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple – dance and ecstasy

Balaram's father, Mani Mallick, Beni Pal and others take their leave. The devotees of the Harisabha at Kansaripara had arrived after twilight. Sri Ramakrishna is dancing with them like an intoxicated elephant.

After dancing, he is absorbed in ecstasy. He says, "I myself will walk a little by myself."

Kishori wants to massage Sri Ramakrishna's feet while he's in ecstasy, but Sri Ramakrishna does not allow anybody to touch him then.

Ishan arrives after dusk. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting, absorbed in ecstasy. After awhile he talks to Ishan. Ishan wants to practice Gayatri purashcharana.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Ishan*): "Do what you have in mind. Are there doubts in your mind any more?"

Vedic path[1] is not for the age of Kali – the path of Tantra[2] is

Ishan: "I've decided to do an atonement ceremony."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Can't it be achieved by the path of Tantra? He who is Brahman is also Shakti, the Primal Power, and Kali. 'Having realized the reality of Kali-Brahman, I've renounced both religion and irreligion.'"[3]

Ishan: "In a hymn to Chandi, it is said that Brahman Itself is the Primal Power. Brahman and His Primal Power are inseparable."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It doesn't help to just say this. It'll be true when you've realized it. After spiritual practice and when the heart is purified, you will clearly know that He alone is the doer. He is the mind, the vital-breath, the intellect. We are only tools.

'You mire the elephant in mud

And make the lame cross the mountain.'

"When your heart is purified, you will realize that He makes you perform rituals like purashcharana. 'It is He who does His work, people say that they do it.'

"When you've attained God-realization, all doubts vanish. The devotee sits contentedly, like a

1. Nigam.
2. Agama: A religious philosophy according to which Shakti is usually the main deity worshipped and the universe is regarded as the divine play of Shakti and Shiva; it deals primarily with spiritual practices and ritual forms of worship.
3. Lines from a Bengali song.

boatman with the tiller in hand who has unfurled his sail when a favourable wind blows and is now enjoying a smoke."

When Ishan has left, Sri Ramakrishna talks with M. alone. He asks him, "What do you think of Narendra, Rakhal, Adhar and Hazra? Are they guileless? And what do you think of me?"

M. says, "You are simple and yet profound. It's very difficult to understand you."

Sri Ramakrishna laughs.

Section XII

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is immersed in samadhi most of the time. He only engages himself outwardly for the instruction of devotees like Rakhal – to awaken their spiritual consciousness.

Everyone is sitting in the verandah to the west of Thakur's room. Today is Tuesday, 4th of Pausha, the 4th of Agrahayana, 18 December 1883. Sri Ramakrishna is praising Devendranath Tagore for his renunciation and devotion to God. Looking at Rakhal and the other young devotees, Thakur says, "He is a good person, but those who never enter into worldly life and develop dispassion by meditating on God day and night from their very childhoods, like Sukadeva, are truly blessed.

"Worldly people nurse some desire or another in spite of themselves – even though they are clearly very devoted. Mathur Babu was entangled in a law-suit. He said to me, 'Father, make this offering of flowers to Mother Kali for me.'[1] I did it whole-heartedly.'

"And Rati's mother – she was so devoted. She used to come occasionally to serve me. She was a Vaishnava devotee. After a few days, as soon as she

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1. Mathur wanted to offer the flowers to the Divine Mother in order to win his law-suit.

noticed that I ate food consecrated to Mother Kali, she stopped coming. So orthodox she was! It's not possible to recognize such a single-track mind at first."

Sri Ramakrishna is seated near the eastern door of the room. It is winter. He is wrapped in a moleskin shawl. Suddenly he sees the sun and then loses all outer-consciousness.

> Is this the realization of the truth of the Gayatri mantra: We meditate on the glory of that Being who has produced this universe; may He enlighten our minds?[1]

After a long time, he comes out of samadhi. Rakhal, Hazra, M. and others are sitting near him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Hazra*): "The feeling in samadhi is ecstatic love. One time in Shyambazar a kirtan was being performed in Natabar Goswami's house. I had a vision of Sri Krishna and the milkmaids and went into samadhi. I felt that my subtle body[2] was following at the heels of Sri Krishna.

"During a kirtan at the Harisabha at Jodasanki, I lost all consciousness of the outer world. I almost quit my body that day."

Sri Ramakrishna goes out for a bath. When he returns, he continues talking about the ecstatic love of the gopis. (*To Mani and others*) "You should accept the attraction of the gopis for Krishna and sing songs like these:

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1. tatsaviturvareṇyaṁ bhargo devasya dhīmahi
   ṛgaveda 3-62-10
2. Linga sharira.

Friend, how far is that forest where my Shyamasundar lives? I cannot walk any farther.

And:

O companion, I shall not go into a house where it is hard for me to chant the name of Krishna.

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna at the Sri Siddheshwari Temple in Thanthania

Sri Ramakrishna had vowed to offer sugar and green coconut to Sri Siddheshwari for Rakhal. He had asked Mani, "Will you pay for the sugar and coconut?"

In the afternoon Sri Ramakrishna, accompanied by Rakhal, Mani and some others, goes in a carriage to the Siddheshwari Temple. They pass through the Shimulia bazaar, where green coconut and sugar are bought.

When they reach the temple, he says to the devotees, "Break open a green coconut, put sugar on it, and offer it to the Divine Mother."

When they had first arrived at the temple, priests and their friends were playing cards in front of Mother Kali. Seeing this, Thakur had said to the devotees, "Look! Playing cards in a place like this! They should be thinking of God here."

Then they go to the house of Jadu Mallick. Several gentlemen are sitting with him.

Jadu says, "Come, please come." After polite enquiries, Sri Ramakrishna says, (*smiling*): "Why do you keep ridiculous courtiers with you?"

Jadu (*smiling*): "So that you may save them!" (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: "Flatterers have in mind that the rich man will give them money. But it's very difficult to extract money from a gentleman. A jackal met a bull and wouldn't leave its side. When the bull was out grazing, the jackal was with him. The jackal thought the testicles of the bull would fall some time or other and he could eat them. Even when the bull slept, the jackal slept next to him. When it rose to graze, the jackal was by its side. A few days passed this way but the testicles did not drop. Disappointed now, the jackal left the bull. (*All laugh.*) Flatterers meet the same fate."

Jadu and his mother treat Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees with refreshments.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with Mani – can one not have both knowledge and love of God?

Wednesday, 19 December 1883. Past nine o'clock in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna is talking with Mani in the Panchavati (see detailed account in Volume IV, Section VII).

Mani (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Can't you have both knowledge and love for God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A person with a very high spiritual ideal can have them both. God-men like Chaitanya Deva had both. But it's different with ordinary human beings.

"There are five kinds of light: the light of a lamp, the light from another kind of fire, the light

from the moon, the light of the sun and the light of the sun and moon together. Love for God is the moon, knowledge is the sun.

"Sometimes you can see the moon in the sky even before the sun has set. In an Incarnation of God and those like him, the moon of devotion and the sun of knowledge appear together.

"Can knowledge and love for God come in a single receptacle just by wishing for it? Only a special kind of person can possess both. Some bamboo has big holes and some very small. Is it possible for everybody to comprehend God within him? Is it possible for a one-seer pot to contain two seers of milk?"

Mani: "But what is not possible by His grace? If He bestows His grace, even a camel can pass through the eye of a needle."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Does He shower His grace just like that? When a beggar begs for a pice, it is given to him. But if he suddenly asks for railway fare, he is refused."

Mani stands there without saying a word. Sri Ramakrishna is also silent. Then suddenly he says, "Yes, no doubt. In the case of some they both come, just by His grace – both knowledge and love for God."

Leaving Thakur respectfully, Mani goes toward the bel tree.[1] It is afternoon when he returns. As he had been delayed, Sri Ramakrishna had started

1 The tree under which Sri Ramakrishna practiced the most austere sadhana; sometimes referred to as the "beltala."

toward the bel tree himself. He notices Mani returning with a carpet, asana, and a pot of water. Thakur meets him near the Panchavati. Mani prostrates before him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "I came to look for you. It was very late and I thought you might have run away by jumping over the wall. Seeing your eyes, I thought maybe you had run away like Narayan Shastri. Then I thought, No, he wouldn't run away. He thinks a great deal before he acts."

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna with Mani and other devotees

Again that night Sri Ramakrishna talks with Mani. Rakhal, Latu, Harish and others are present.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Well, some people give a metaphysical interpretation of Krishna in Vrindavan. What is your opinion?"

Mani: "There are different opinions. There's no harm in it. You told the story of Bhishma Deva. Before quitting his body, when he was lying on a bed of arrows he said, 'Why am I weeping? Not because of the pain. When I think that God Himself was the charioteer of Arjuna and yet so many troubles befell the Pandavas, I realize that I have not understood God's ways at all. That's why I weep.'

"And then you told us about Hanuman's saying, 'I don't know the day of the week or the position of the stars. I only contemplate Rama.'

"And you said that there is nothing else besides the two: Brahman and Shakti. You also said that when a person attains the knowledge of Brahman, both of them are felt to be one, only one without a second."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, certainly. You have to attain your goal, whether you go through a forest of thorns or along a good road.

"Of course, there are many opinions. The Naked One (Totapuri) said, 'Sadhus can't be fed together because of the difference of their views. Once a feast was arranged and sadhus from different sects went. Each sect insisted that their group be served first and the others later. No solution could be found. In the end, they all left. Prostitutes were served the food.'"

Mani: "Totapuri was a great man."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Hazra said, 'He was just ordinary.' No brother, there's no use in talking about it. Everybody says only his watch gives the correct time.

"Look what dispassion Narayan Shastri developed. Such a great scholar. He left his wife and disappeared. When a person has renounced lust and greed totally, he attains union with God. Some have the characteristics of a yogi.

"I'll have to tell you about the six spiritual centres. After piercing them, yogis attain God's vision by His grace. Have you heard about the six spiritual centres?"

Mani: "According to the Vedanta school of thought, there are seven planes."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Not Vedanta. According to the Vedas. Do you know what the six centres are like? There are 'lotuses inside the subtle body'. Yogis can see them – like the leaves and fruits of a wax tree."

Mani: "Yes, sir. Yogis can see them. One book says that there is a kind of glass that magnifies a very small object, causing it to appear larger. In the same way these subtle lotuses can be seen."

Sri Ramakrishna has asked Mani to stay in the hut in the Panchavati. He spends the night there. At dawn he sings the following song alone in the hut:

O Gauranga, I am without austerity and prayer. Please purify this lowly person with Thy philosopher's stone.

My only thought is that I shall attain Thy feet.

O Gaur, I have not reached Thy feet – my days have passed in vainless hope and expectation.

Suddenly, he looks toward the window and sees Sri Ramakrishna standing there. Hearing, "Purify this lowly person with Thy philosopher's stone," his eyes are filled with tears.

And then Mani sings another song:

I shall put on the ochre robe and wear earrings of Mother of Pearl.

Having donned the robe of a yogini, I shall go to that region where hard-hearted Hari is.

Sri Ramakrishna walks on with Rakhal by his side.

The next day, Friday, 21 December, Sri Ramakrishna talks to Mani alone at the bel tree. He is talking about different secret spiritual practices and about renunciation of 'lust and greed'. He also talks about how the mind itself becomes the guru – he talks about things like this.

After his meal he comes to the Panchavati, wearing a beautiful yellow robe. Two or three Vaishnava sadhus arrive. One of them is a Baul. Thakur says to the Vaishnavas, "Please tell me the meaning of the string in your loin-cloth."

In the afternoon a monk of the order of Nanak[1] arrives. Harish and Rakhal are also present. The sadhu believes in the formless Absolute. Thakur asks him to meditate on God with form also.

Sri Ramakrishna says to the sadhu, "Dive, dive. You can't find jewels by swimming on the surface. God is without form but also with form. A person develops love quickly by meditating on God with form. Then you can meditate on the Formless again. It's like throwing away a letter after reading it – then he attends to the instructions of the letter."

Chapter V

At Dakshineswar with the devotees – Balaram's father and others

Today is Saturday, 22 December 1883. It is about nine in the morning. Balaram's father has arrived. Rakhal, Harish, M. and Latu are staying here. Devendra Ghosh of Shyampukur arrives. Sri Ramakrishna is

1. Nanakpanthi.

sitting with the devotees on the southeastern verandah.

A devotee asks him: "How do you develop love for God?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Balaram's father and the other devotees*): "Go forward! The king sits beyond the seven gates. Only when you've passed through all the gates, can you see him.

"During the installation of Annapurna at Chanak (1874-75), I said to Dwaraka Babu, 'There are big fish in the deep water of a large pond. Drop bait for them. They will make a big splash when they smell it.' Ecstatic love – love and devotion – is the bait."

Sri Ramakrishna and the meaning of incarnation

"God plays as a human being. He incarnates in a man – for example, Sri Krishna, Ramachandra and Chaitanya Deva.

"I said to Keshab Sen, 'There is the greatest manifestation of God in man. There are small holes in the ridges on the edge of a [rice] field. They're called *ghutis*. Small fish and crab gather there. If you want to find them, you have to look in these holes. If you're looking for God, look for Him in an incarnation of God.

"'The Mother of the Universe manifests Herself in the person three and a half cubits tall. There is a song that goes:

What a machine Mother Kali has made!

In this machine, three and a half cubits high, what pranks She plays!

She Herself residing within pulls the string to make it move.

The machine thinks it moves by itself, knowing not who its operator is.

But the machine who knows it is She will be a machine no more.

And Mother Shyama Herself will be tied with the string of love.

"But you have to practice spiritual disciplines if you want to realize God and to recognize an incarnation. There are big fish in a large pond. You have to throw bait for them. Milk contains butter, but you have to churn it. Mustard contains oil – but it has to be pressed to extract the oil. Henna makes a palm red – but you have to grind it first."

Sri Ramakrishna and the worship of the Formless

A Devotee (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Well! Is God formless or with form?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Wait. First go to Calcutta, then you'll know where Fort Maidan is and where the Asiatic society is and where the Bengal Bank is.

"If you want to go to the brahmin quarter in Khardaha, you have to first reach Khardaha.

"Why shouldn't it be possible to practice discipline of the formless? But it is very difficult. You can't practice it without renouncing 'lust and greed' – both outwardly and inwardly. You won't succeed if there is even a trace of worldly calculation.

"Worship of God with form is easier. But it's not that easy.

"You shouldn't talk to devotees about the spiritual disciplines of God without form, of the path of knowledge. It's only with a great deal of difficulty that a person develops a little love for God. Calling everything a dream can harm devotional feelings.

"Kavirdas believed in the formless God. He didn't believe in Shiva, Kali or Krishna. He used to say, 'Kali eats rice and bananas and Krishna danced like a monkey when the milkmaids clapped.' (*Everybody laughs.*)

"A worshipper of the formless perhaps first sees the ten-armed one and then the four-armed one. Then he sees the two-armed Gopala. Finally he sees the indivisible light and is merged in it.

"Dattatreya and Jadabharata didn't return after the vision of Brahman – so it is said.

"According to one belief, Sukadeva tasted only a drop of that ocean of Brahman. He saw and heard the play of the waves on the ocean – but he didn't dive into it.

"A brahmachari said to me, 'If you go beyond Kedar, your body will not survive.' Similarly, the body doesn't survive after attaining the knowledge of Brahman. The body dies in twenty-one days.

"There is a boundless plain on the other side of the wall. Four friends tried to see what was on the other side. Each one of them climbed the wall and, after seeing the field, fell into it laughing, exclaiming, 'Ah! Aha!' The first three didn't come back to give a report. Only one of them did. His body survived even after attaining the knowledge of

Brahman – in order to teach people. For example, Divine Incarnations.

"Parvati was born as the daughter of King Himalaya.[1] She began to show her different forms to her father. Himalaya said, 'Daughter, I have seen all these forms. But you also have the form of Brahman. Please show that to me.' Parvati said, 'Father, if you want the knowledge of Brahman, you will have to renounce the world and keep the company of sadhus.'

"But Himalaya would not give up beseeching her. So Parvati showed him her Brahman form. No sooner did he see it than he fainted."

Sri Ramakrishna and bhakti yoga

"All that I have said is a matter of deliberation. 'Only Brahman is real and the world an illusion' is the idea – that everything is a dream! It's a very hard path. In this path God's play is like a dream and so unreal. The 'I' also vanishes. In this path an incarnation of God is not accepted. Very difficult. Devotees shouldn't listen to much of such ideas.

"The reason God incarnates is to teach and cultivate love of God. He tells us to accept Him as a refuge. When a person has love for God and devotion to Him, everything happens by His grace – knowledge and vijnana, everything.

"He plays. He is under control of the devotee."

Mother Shyama has tied Herself with the string of love.

1. The king of the mountains.

"Sometimes God is the magnet and the devotee is the needle. At other times the devotee becomes the magnet and God the needle. A devotee attracts Him. The devotee has the gracious loving Lord under his control.

"According to one belief, Yashoda and the other milkmaids were believers of the Formless in earlier incarnations. They were not satisfied with that. So they enjoyed sporting with Sri Krishna at Vrindavan. One day Sri Krishna said, 'I'll show you the Eternal Abode.[1] Let's go to Jamuna for a bath. As soon as they dove into the water, they saw Goloka, and then the Indivisible Light.' Yashoda said, 'O Krishna, I don't want to see all this anymore. I only want to see Your human form. I want to take You in my arms and feed You.'

"That's why God is more manifest in His incarnation. As long as an incarnation of God lives in a human form, he should be worshipped and served.

O Brother, he will hide himself in the morning, in that secret chamber within.

"Not everyone can recognize an incarnation of God. Assuming a body, disease, sorrow, hunger and thirst, all invade him. He appears like any one of us. Rama wept in sorrow at his separation from Sita.

Bound by the five elements, even Brahman laments.

"It is said in the Puranas, 'After killing Hiranyaksha, God[2] lived happily with its young

1. Nityadham.
2. Vishnu as the Boar Incarnation.

ones, suckling them. (*Everybody laughs.*) He didn't think at all of returning to His own heavenly abode. At last Shiva came and killed the body with a trident and God, laughing out loud, returned to His abode.'"

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna with Bhavanath, Mani, Latu and others

It is afternoon. Bhavanath has arrived. Rakhal, M., Harish and others are in the room. It is Saturday, 22 December 1883.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bhavanath*): "It's enough if you develop love for an incarnation of God. Oh, what love the milkmaids had!"

Saying this, Thakur assumes the attitude of the milkmaids and sings:

Shyam, You are the soul of my soul.

And:

My companion, I will not go home.

Again:

The other day I was standing at the door. Friends, you were going to the wood.

I wish I were a cowboy carrying your load on my head.

"When Sri Krishna disappeared in the midst of the dancing, the milkmaids became mad [with grief]. Seeing a tree, they said to it, 'Maybe you are a hermit. You've surely seen Sri Krishna. If not, how could you have become so immobile, absorbed in samadhi?' Seeing the ground covered with grass,

they said to the ground, 'O, surely you have seen him. If not, why does your hair stand on end? Surely, you have tasted the joy of his touch.' And seeing a madhavi creeper, they said, 'O madhavi, give us Madhava.' The milkmaids are mad with divine love.

"When Akrur arrived, Sri Krishna and Balaram got into his chariot to go to Mathura. The milkmaids caught hold of its wheels. They would not let it move."

After saying this, Sri Ramakrishna sings again:

Don't hold the wheels of the chariot. Please do not.

Does this chariot move because of the wheels?

It is Hari who is the charioteer – He who moves the world moves the chariot.

Sri Ramakrishna: "'Does this chariot move because of its wheels?' – I like that very much. 'He who moves the world moves the chariot' – the charioteer moves the chariot by His command."

Section XIII

Sri Ramakrishna with the Devotees in Ram Chandra's Garden House

Chapter I

Today Sri Ramakrishna is going to visit Ram Chandra's new garden. It is Wednesday, 26 December 1883.

Ram adores Thakur and considers him an incarnation of God. Every now and then he goes to Dakshineswar to see Thakur and worship him. He has bought a new garden close to Surendra's garden house. Sri Ramakrishna is going to see it.

Manilal Mallick, M. and one or two other devotees are seated in the carriage with Thakur. Manilal Mallick is a Brahmo devotee. The Brahmos don't believe in divine incarnation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Manilal*): "If you want to meditate on God, you should first try to meditate on the attributeless. He is without attributes, beyond mind and speech. But it's very difficult to become expert in such meditation.

"He incarnates Himself as a man. It is very easy then to practice meditation – Narayana in man. The body is only a veil, like a lantern with a light burning inside. Or like seeing valuable things in a glass case."

Alighting from the carriage, Sri Ramakrishna first goes with Ram and the devotees to see the tulsi grove in the garden.

Standing there, Thakur says, "O, it's a beautiful place. You can meditate on God very nicely here."

Now he goes to a room south of the pond and sits down. Ram Chandra has grapes, oranges and some sweetmeats on a plate for him. Thakur enjoys them with the devotees.

In a little while he walks around the whole garden.

Next he starts toward Surendra's garden, which is nearby. He walks a little, and before he climbs into the carriage to continue on, Sri Ramakrishna notices a sadhu sitting alone on a cot under a tree in the next garden. As soon as he saw him, he went to the sadhu and talks happily with him in Hindi.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the sadhu*): "To which order of sadhus do you belong? Are you from the Giri or Puri Order?"

Sadhu: "People call me a paramahamsa."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Very good, great indeed. It's nice to have the attitude 'I am Shiva.'[1] But then, it's also true – creation, preservation and dissolution go on day and night by His power. The Primal Power and the Absolute are inseparable. Without Brahman there is no Power, as there cannot be a wave without water, or music without an instrument.

"As long as He keeps us in the phenomenal world, we have a feeling of duality. But when you speak of power, you speak of Brahman – like being aware of day when you are aware of night.

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1. Shivoham.

"In another state, He shows us that the Absolute is beyond knowledge and ignorance. This cannot be expressed in words. What is, is."

It is after this nice conversation that Sri Ramakrishna goes back to the carriage. The sadhu accompanies him, arm in arm, like a long-time friend. When Thakur gets into the carriage, the sadhu returns to his place.

Next Sri Ramakrishna comes to Surendra's garden. Sitting with the devotees, the first thing he talks about is the sadhu.

Sri Ramakrishna: "He is a very good person. (*To Ram*) When you come to Dakshineswar the next time, bring him. He's a superior sadhu. There's a song that says that unless you're simple yourself, you can't recognize another simple man.

"He believes in God without form – that's all right. God is both formless and with form – and much more! The Absolute belongs to the same One that the phenomenal belongs. That which is beyond mind and speech takes different forms, incarnates and enters into various activities. From the same Om have come 'Om Shiva', 'Om Kali' and 'Om Krishna'. The master of a house sent a small boy of the family to invite people for a feast. What respect they showed him because he was the son or grandson of an important person."

After having refreshments at Surendra's, Sri Ramakrishna proceeds toward Dakshineswar with the devotees.

Chapter II

Thakur in Dakshineswar among devotees, Tantrik and others

Today is Wednesday, 2 January 1884, 19th day of Pausha, the 4th day of the bright fortnight, 1290 (B.Y.).

Sri Ramakrishna is in the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar in the company of devotees. Staying with him at the time are Rakhal, Latu, Harish, Ramlal and M.

It is 3 o'clock. Returning from the bel tree, Mani walks toward Sri Ramakrishna's room to see him. He is sitting on the western verandah with a Tantrik devotee.

Mani comes and salutes him by prostrating on the ground. Thakur asks him to sit near him. Perhaps he wishes to teach him while he talks to the Tantrik devotee. Mahima Chakravarti has sent the Tantrik devotee to Thakur. The devotee wears ochre.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the Tantrik*): "It's part of Tantrik discipline to drink wine from a human skull. Isn't the wine called karana?"

Tantrik: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Eleven cups – isn't that right?"

The Tantrik: "Three tolas for spiritual discipline with a corpse."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But I can't even touch wine."

Tantrik: "You have spontaneous bliss.[1] Attaining such bliss, a person needs nothing else."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And please note that I don't even like japa and austerities. But I have constant remembrance and recollection of Him. Well, what are the six spiritual centres?"

Tantrik: "Sir, they are like places of pilgrimage. Shiva and Shakti reside in each spiritual centre, though they are invisible – you can't take them out by cutting into the body. The stalk of the lotus is the Shivalinga. The Primal Power is in the pistil of the vulva-shaped lotus."

Mani listens to the conversation silently. Glancing at him, Sri Ramakrishna asks the Tantrik devotee, "Well, can a person attain perfection without being initiated with a seed mantra?"[2]

Tantrik: "It's possible by faith – faith in the words of the guru."

Sri Ramakrishna (*turning to Mani and calling his attention*): "Faith!"

After the Tantrik devotee has left, Jaygopal Sen, a Brahmo, comes in. Sri Ramakrishna talks with him. Rakhal, Mani and other devotees are seated near them. It is afternoon.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Jaygopal*): "A person shouldn't entertain malice toward any person or belief. Believers in the formless as well as believers in God with form are going toward Him – whether it's a jnani, a yogi, or a devotee, they're all looking

1. Sahajananda.
2. Bija.

for Him. On the path of knowledge, He's called Brahman. Yogis call Him Atman, Paramatman. Devotees call Him Bhagavan, Lord. And then also 'eternal-god', 'eternal-servant'."

Jaygopal: "How can we know that all paths are true?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A person can attain God by following any one path properly. Then he can learn about all the other paths. It's like climbing up to a roof, whether you do it by a wooden ladder or brick steps or even by a rope.

"When God's grace descends, a devotee can know everything. You will know everything once you realize Him. You have to meet the landlord by whatever means possible – you have to talk to him. The he himself will tell you how many gardens, ponds and company securities he has."

The way to realize God

Jaygopal: "How do you receive God's grace?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You have to chant His name and glories constantly. You have to renounce worldly thoughts as much as possible. You may have brought water to your field to irrigate it with great difficulty, but it is lost if there are holes in the ridge of the field – all the labour of digging a channel to the field is wasted.

"When your mind is purified and you are rid of attachment to the world, you will feel yearning for God and your prayer will reach God. If a telegraph wire is damaged by something or there is a break in it, you can't send a message.

"I used to weep all alone, full of yearning. I'd cry, 'Where are You Narayan?' While I cried, I would lose consciousness – and get merged in the Mahavayu.[1]

"How can union with God be attained? If there is no damage to the telegraph wire – no break – you achieve union. You must rid yourself of worldly attachment completely.

"You must not entertain any desire. If you have a craving, your love for God is selfish.[2] Devotion without desire[3] is love for its own sake[4] – whether or not you love me, I still love you. This is called love for its own sake.

"The basic thing is to love God. When you've developed intense love, you will see God. When these three things are combined into one – the attraction of a chaste wife for her husband, the love of a mother for her child, and the attachment of a worldly person for things of the world – you will have the vision of God."

Jaygopal is a businessman. Is that why Sri Ramakrishna thinks these instructions might be useful to him?

1. Cosmic Consciousness or the life force; a word also used to denote the spiritual current in the spinal column when the Kundalini is awakened.
2. Sakama.
3. Nishkama bhakti.
4. Ahetuki bhakti.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna tells Mani not to reason any more

Today is Friday, 4 January 1884. It is four o'clock. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting at the Panchavati smiling. With him are Mani, Haripada and some others. He is talking with Haripada about Hiranda Chatterji and about the spiritual practices of the Ghoshpara sect.

Sri Ramakrishna returns to his room. Mani, Haripada, Rakhal and other devotees are there. Mani has been spending a good deal of time under the bel tree.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Don't reason any more. It harms you in the end. You must assume one particular attitude when you call on God – the attitude of a friend, of a maidservant, or a child or a hero.

"I have the attitude of a child. When the goddess of maya notices this attitude, she moves out of the way in shame.

"The heroic attitude is very difficult. The Shaktas and the Vaishnava bauls practice this attitude. It is very difficult to remain correct with this attitude. Besides, there are the attitudes of serenity, of a servant or friend, as well as the filial attitude.[1]

(*To Mani*) "Which attitude do you like best?"

Mani: "I like all of them."

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1. Shanta, dasya, sakhya and vatsalya.

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's only in the state of perfection that a person likes all these attitudes. In that state, there is no trace of lust. The story of Chandidas and the washerwoman Rajakini is in the Vaishnava scriptures. Their love had no trace of lust.

"In that state a man has the disposition of a female – he no longer has the feeling of being a man. Rupa Goswami refused to see Mirabai because she was a woman. Mira sent the message: 'Sri Krishna is the only male, everyone else in Vrindavan are his maidservants. Was it right for the Goswami to nurse the ego of a male?'"

At dusk Mani sits again at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. A message has been received that Keshab Sen's disease has taken a turn for the worse. In connection with this, the subject of the Brahmo Samaj comes up.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "Well, are there only lectures there? Do they also practice meditation? Maybe they call it worship.

"Earlier in his life Keshab studied the Christian religion and faith deeply. At that time and before that, he was associated with Devendra Thakur (Tagore)."

Mani: "If Keshab Babu had come here from the beginning, he wouldn't have been so busy with social reform. He wouldn't have given so much thought to removing the caste system and widow remarriage, inter-caste marriage, female education and such social concerns."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Keshab now believes in Kali – the embodiment of knowledge and consciousness – the Primal Power. He chants Her name and glories crying, 'Mother, Mother.'

"Well, do you think the Brahmo Samaj will continue to exist as a sort of social reform movement?"

Mani: "This isn't the tradition in this country. The correct thing will take root here."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, the Sanatana Dharma[1] – that which the rishis taught – will last. But the Brahmo Samaj and other such sects will also continue in some form. Everything comes and goes by God's will."

A number of devotees came from Calcutta in the afternoon. They sang many songs for Thakur. One of the songs says:

> Mother, You have made us forget by giving us a red pap.[2]
> When we throw away the pap and cry for You, You will certainly come running to us.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mani*): "They only sang about red paps."

Mani: "Sir, you talked about them with Keshab Sen."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. But I also talked about the Sky of Consciousness and many other things. We enjoyed ourselves singing and dancing."

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1. The Eternal Religion.
2. Pacifier.

Section XIV

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with Manilal and other devotees

Chapter I

Today is Sunday, 9 March 1884, 27th day of Falgun. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room at the Dakshineswar Temple with several devotees – Manilal Mallick, Mahendra Kaviraj of Sinthi, Balaram, M., Bhavanath, Rakhal, Latu, Adhar, Mahimacharan, Harish, Kishori Gupta, Shivachandra and others. Girish, Kali and Subodh have not yet arrived. Sashi and Sarat have visited Thakur only once or twice, Purna and the Younger Naren have not yet met him.

Sri Ramakrishna's arm is in a splint. He broke it when he fell down near a railing in a state of ecstasy. It was only a short time ago and his arm is giving him constant pain. But even in this condition, he is often merged in samadhi or speaks to the devotees of deep eternal truths.

One day while he was crying with pain, he suddenly went into samadhi. When he returned to the normal state of consciousness, he said to Mahimacharan and some other devotees, "Babu, if you haven't realized Sat-chit-ananda, you have achieved nothing. It can't happen without deep longing." I used to weep and call out, "O friend of the humble, I am without spiritual effort – but you have to grant me Your vision!"

Mahimacharan, Adhar, M. and others are now sitting with Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan and the others*): "There is a kind of love for God that is

completely unselfish.[1] You can perfect it in your life – if you can practice it!"

(*To Adhar*): "Can you stroke this arm a little?"

Manilal Mallick and Bhavanath talk about the exhibition which took place near the Asiatic Museum in 1883-84. They say, "So many kings had sent precious things to it – golden bed and so on – worth seeing."

Sri Ramakrishna, wealth and splendour

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to the devotees*): "Yes, a person can gain a lot by going to exhibits. Seeing such valuable articles and other belongings of the rajas and maharajas, you develop repulsion for them. This in itself is a great gain.

"When I used to go to Calcutta, Hriday would show me the residence of the Governor General. He'd say, 'Uncle, just look at the palace of the Viceroy with its big pillars.' The Mother showed me that it was just clay bricks placed one on top of another.

"The Lord and His splendour. Splendour only lasts two days or so. Only God is true. Think of a magician and his magic. Seeing the tricks, everybody is amazed – but it is all illusion. The magician alone is true. Or take a rich man and his garden. Seeing the garden, you should try to meet its owner."

Mani Mallick (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "And what an amount of electric light they've put in it! Seeing

1. Ahetuki bhakti.

it, you feel how great whoever invented electric light is."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Manilal*): "One idea is that He Himself has become everything that you see. And the person who says it is also He – God, maya, the individual soul, and the universe."

Now they talk about the museum.

Sri Ramakrishna and the company of the holy – the picture of a yogi

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Once I went to the museum. I saw that everything there had turned into brick or stone – animals had become transformed into fossils. I saw what can happen as the result of company. Like that, by keeping the company of holy people, a person becomes like them."

Mani Mallick (*smiling*): "By going there (to the exhibition) only once, you have material to teach us for ten to fifteen years."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "What, for example?"

Balaram: "No. If you go around here and there and everywhere, your arm won't heal."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I'd like to have two pictures – one of a yogi sitting near a sacred fire. And the other of a yogi pulling deeply on a chillum of hemp, with the coals of his pipe blazing up.

"Such images are very inspiring. Like an imitation custard apple. Seeing it, you're reminded of a real one.

"But there are obstacles to union with God – 'lust and greed'. When the mind is purified, it attains union with God. The seat of the mind is in the forehead[1] – but attention remains tied to the organs of generation and evacuation – in other words, to 'lust and greed'. Through spiritual practices, the mind turns upward.

"What spiritual practice turns the mind up? You come to understand this by keeping the constant company of holy people.

"The rishis lived either alone or in the company of sadhus. That's why they could renounce 'lust and greed' and unite their minds to God effortlessly. They rid themselves of fear and fault-finding.

"You must pray to God to give you the ability to renounce – to enable you to give up immediately what appears to be an illusion.

"The rishis had this ability. They conquered their senses because of it. When a tortoise pulls in its limbs, it doesn't let them out even if you cut it into four pieces.

"A worldly man is a hypocrite. He's not guileless. He'll say, 'I love God,' but he doesn't give God even the least attraction he has for worldly things, the love he has for 'lust and gold'. All the while saying he loves God.

(*To Mani Mallick*): "Give up hypocrisy."

Manilal: "About men or about God?"

1. The ajna chakra, between the eyebrows.

Sri Ramakrishna: "In every way. Regarding everything, man as well as God. You must not be hypocritical.

"How guileless Bhavanath is! After his marriage he came to me and said, 'Why do I have so much affection for my wife?' Oh, he is so guileless!

"Why wouldn't a man feel love for his wife? She is the world-bewitching maya of the Mother of the Universe. A man begins to think of his wife as if no one in the whole world is equal to her – she is one's own in life and death, in this life and hereafter.

"How much a man suffers because of his wife! Even then, he thinks she has no parallel. What a terrible thing! A salary of twenty rupees a month and he already has three children. He doesn't have the means to feed them properly. The roof of his house leaks, but there is no money to repair it. He can't afford a new book for his son. He can't celebrate his son's sacred thread ceremony, but has to beg eight annas from here and another eight from there.

"Only a wife with spiritual qualities is a real partner in life. She helps her husband to advance toward God. They live like brother and sister after having one or two children. Both are devotees of God – His servant and His maid. Their family is a spiritual family. They know that God alone is one's own – one's own for eternity. Don't ever forget Him, in happiness or in sorrow – like the Pandavas."

Worldly devotee and devotee who has renounced

"For worldly people, the love of God is only momentary, like water dropped on a burning pan. It dries up right away, *pssht*!

"The mind of worldly people is attached to sense pleasures. So it doesn't have that love, that restlessness for God.

"The *ekadashi* fast on the eleventh day of the lunar month is of three kinds. One, without water, – even water is not drunk. This is the fast of an all-renouncing mendicant. He has completely renounced all enjoyment. Second, a person can take milk and sweets made of milk. It's like a devotee who keeps a few things of enjoyment in his house. Third, the devotee eats luchi and vegetables to his fill. He may even keep two chapattis soaked in milk to eat later on.

"People practice spiritual disciplines, but their minds remain tied to 'lust and greed'. That's why they don't get results from their practices.

"Hazra used to practice a lot of japa and austerities here. But he had a wife and children in the country, and a piece of land. While he practiced japa, in his mind he was engaged in the business of a broker. Such people can't stick to their word. One minute they may say they won't eat fish, but then the next minute they eat it.

"What won't a person do for the sake of money! He can even make a brahmin and a sadhu carry a load for him.

"Sandesh may become rotten, but I couldn't give it to such people. I can use water from the toilet can of other people, but I can't touch the can of worldly people.

"Seeing a rich man, Hazra would welcome him. He'd call out to him and talk to him. And he'd say to him, 'You see Rakhal and the others. They don't practice austerities or japa. They just wander around talking.

"There may be a person living in a cave in the hills with his body covered with ashes, and he may observe fasts and practice different kinds of austerities, but if his mind is on worldly things inwardly, on 'lust and greed,' I say 'fie on him!' On the other hand, if a person eats, drinks and wanders around here and there but his mind is not on 'lust and greed,' I call him blessed."

(*Pointing to Mani Mallick*) "He doesn't have a picture of a holy man in his house. Pictures of sadhus awaken divine feelings."

Manilal: "Yes, I do. Nandini[1] has a picture in her room of a European woman praying. And there's another picture. A man is holding to the Rock of Faith. There's a bottomless sea below him. By losing hold of faith, he'd fall into the water and drown. And there's another picture. Some girls are keeping vigil with their lamps filled with oil, waiting for the bridegroom.[2] Anyone who falls

1. The widowed daughter of Mani Mallick and a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna.
2. St. Matthew 25:1 – "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lantern, and went forth to meet the bridegroom."

asleep will not be able to see the bridegroom when he arrives. Here, the bridegroom stands for God."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "That's very good."

Manilal: "There are other pictures too – one of the Tree of Faith and the other of Sin and Virtue."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bhavanath*): "These are all beautiful pictures. You must go see them."

After awhile Sri Ramakrishna says, "I think about these things sometimes, and then I don't like all that. In the beginning you can talk about sin and how to be free from it. But, if by God's grace, you begin to feel love for Him, you develop devotion, you forget all about sin and virtue. Then you go beyond injunctions and scriptures. You no longer feel you have to bother about penance and repentance.

"It's like reaching your destination by a winding river, taking a long time and with great difficulty. But if the water rises in flood, you reach your destination by a straight path, without difficulty and in a short time. Then there is pole-deep water even on dry land.

"In the early stages you have to go around and about and face a lot of difficulties. But when you develop intense love for God, the path becomes straight. It's like choosing any direction to cross a field after the paddy has been harvested. Before, you had to go around and along the ridge of the field, but now you can go any way you like. Even if there is stubble, you can put on shoes to walk across. If you have discrimination, non-attachment

and faith in the words of the guru, you won't have any trouble."

Sri Ramakrishna and Dhyana Yoga, Vishnu Yoga – meditation on the Formless and God with form

Manilal (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Well, what is the rule for meditation? Where should one meditate?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "The heart is the most well-known place. You can meditate either there or in the Sahasrara.[1] These are rules for meditation according to the scriptures. But you can meditate wherever you want. Every place is filled with Brahman. Where is Brahman not present?

"When Narayana, in Vali's presence, covered the heavens, the earth and the nether-world in three steps, did any place remain uncovered? Whether it is the bank of the Ganges or a dirty place, they are equally holy. Besides, it's said that everything you see is His Universal Image.[2]

"Meditation on the Formless and on God with-form. To meditate on the Formless is very difficult. In that meditation whatever you may see or hear will melt away; then you will contemplate your true Self. Contemplating his own Self, Shiva dances. He dances, exclaiming, 'Who am I, who am I?' This is called Shiva Yoga. While meditating, your gaze should be fixed on the forehead. You must give up the world and meditate on your real Self after confirming, 'Not this, not this.'

1. The thousand-petalled lotus at the top of the head.
2. Virat.

"And then there is Vishnu Yoga. You fix your sight on the tip of your nose – half within, the other half on the world. Meditation on God with form is like this.

"Shiva sometimes dances when meditating on God with form. Then he exclaims, 'Rama, Rama!'"

Chapter II

The state after realization of God

Manilal Mallick is an old member of the Brahmo Samaj. Bhavanath, Rakhal and M. sometimes go there. Sri Ramakrishna is explaining 'Omkar,' and the stage after the knowledge of Brahman and the vision of Brahman.

The anahata sound[1] and the supreme state

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Sound Brahman.[2] Rishis and sages used to practice austerities to hear this sound. When you attain perfection, you hear it rising automatically from the navel.

"Some ask, 'What is the use of just hearing this sound?' You can hear the sound of waves from a distance. If you follow the sound, you will reach the ocean – when there is the sound of waves, the ocean must be near. By following the anahata sound, you reach Brahman, which is what it indicates. That is called the supreme state.[3] But as long as you are

1. Om.
2. Shabda.
3. yatra nādo vilīyate [where the nada ends.]
tadviṣṇoḥ paramaṁ padaṁ sadā paśyanti sūrayaḥ
ṛgaveda saṁhitā 1-23-20

conscious of your I-ness, you cannot have this kind of perception. It is possible only when there is neither 'I,' nor you, nor many."

Union of individual soul and supreme soul

"Just imagine the sun and ten pitchers of water. You see the reflection of the sun in every pitcher. At first you see one sun and ten reflected suns. If nine pitchers break, there remains only one sun and a reflected one. Each of the pitchers is like an individual soul. Following the reflection, we can reach the true sun – from the individual soul to the supreme soul. The individual soul can have the vision of the supreme soul if he practices spiritual disciplines. But if you break the last pitcher, what remains cannot be described.

"At first the embodied soul is ignorant – it is not aware of God, but is aware of many things. When knowledge arises, it feels that God is in all things. It's like taking out a thorn that's stuck in your foot by finding another thorn to take it out. It's taking out the thorn of ignorance with the thorn of knowledge. And when you attain vijnana, you throw away both thorns – the one of ignorance as well as the one of knowledge. In that state you don't merely have a vision of God, but you converse with God day and night.

"A person who has only heard about milk is ignorant. One who has seen it has acquired some

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[Just as the eye perceives the universe in the vast expanse of the sky, the illumined souls too have the clear perception of that supreme state of Vishnu, the all-pervading Reality.]

knowledge. But the one who has become strong after drinking milk has attained vijnana."

Perhaps Thakur is now explaining his own state of mind to the devotees. By describing the state of a vijnani, he may be describing his own state.

Sri Ramakrishna's state of mind, told by himself – the state after attaining God's vision

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "There is a difference between a sadhu who is a jnani and a sadhu who is a vijnani. The way a jnani sadhu sits is very different. He twirls his moustache. When somebody comes to see him, he says, 'What's brought you here, sir? Have you any questions?'

"Those who see God constantly and talk to Him are vijnanis. They have a different nature. One moment they are inert, another moment they act like a ghoul, and sometimes childlike, other times like a madman.

"Such a person loses all outward consciousness when he goes into samadhi. He becomes inert. He sees everything filled with Brahman, so he behaves like a ghoul. He's not conscious of purity and impurity. He can eat a plum at the same time he defecates – like a child. When he soils himself at night, he doesn't feel polluted, knowing that the body is made from semen.

"He's not aware of urination and defecation. For him everything is filled with Brahman. Rice and dal become filthy like faeces to him when they turn bad.

"Then again he acts like a madman. Noticing his conduct, people think he's insane.

"And sometimes he acts like a child, free from all bonds – shame, hatred, hesitation, and so on.

"This is the state that comes with God-realization. It's like a ship sailing near a magnetic hill. All the screws and nails of the ship are loosened. With God-realization, lust, anger, etc. vanish.

"I noticed that the screws lost their heads when lightning hit Mother Kali's temple.

"A person who has seen God is no longer able to continue creation by begetting children. When you sow rice you get plants, but boiled rice won't yield plants.

"Those who have realized God retain their 'I' only in name. It can't do any harm. It exists only in name, like the mark left by a fallen coconut branch. The branch has fallen – only its mark remains.

The 'I' when God is realized – Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab Sen

(*To the devotees*) "I said to Keshab Sen, 'Give up your "I" – renounce the consciousness that you are the doer, that you teach men.' Keshab Sen said, 'Sir, then I will lose my organization!' I said, 'Renounce the rascal 'I'.'

"You don't have to give up the feeling that you are God's servant, that you are God's devotee. But as long as the rascal 'I' remains, you can't do this.

"When there is a man in charge of the storeroom, the master doesn't take responsibility for the food in it."

Sri Ramakrishna – God's play as a human being and the essence of an incarnation

(*To the devotees*) "Look, because I've hurt my arm, my temperament is changing. Now I see that God is more manifest in man. It's as if He's saying, 'I reside in human beings. Enjoy yourself in their company.'

"He is more manifest in pure devotees – that's why I long so much for Narendra, Rakhal and others like them.

"You find small holes at the edge of lakes. Fish and crab collect in those holes – just as God is more manifest in man.

"They say that a man is even greater than the Shalagram, Nara-Narayana.[1] If God manifests Himself in an image, why can't He manifest Himself in man?

"He appears as a man to play as a human being – for example Ramachandra, Sri Krishna, Chaitanya Deva. When you meditate on an incarnation, you meditate on God."

Bhagavan Das, a Brahmo devotee, arrives.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bhagavan Das*): "The rishis followed the Eternal Religion.[2] It has existed since eternity and will continue forever. Whether with form or without form, it is the Eternal Religion.

1. An emblem of Vishnu.
2. Sanatana Dharma.

There is the path of knowledge and the path of devotion. Other modern religions will last for a few days and then disappear."

Section XV

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar – Phalaharini Puja and the Vidyasundar Musical Theatrical Performance

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with Rakhal,[1] Adhar, Hari[2] and other devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room. It is eleven o'clock. Rakhal, M. and some other devotees are present. The Phalaharini Kali Puja was celebrated last night. A musical theatrical performance of Vidyasundar played in the natmandir late at night. Sri Ramakrishna had watched a little of it when he went to visit the Mother in the temple in the morning. After the actors took their baths, they came to see Sri Ramakrishna.

It is Saturday, 24 May 1884, 12th of Jaishtha, a new moon day.[3]

The fair-skinned young man who had played the role of Vidya had acted his part really well. Sri Ramakrishna happily talks to him about spiritual things. The devotees listen intently to the conversation.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the actor who played Vidya*): "Your acting was beautiful. Anybody who is

1. Later Swami Brahmananda.
2. Later Swami Turiyananda.
3. Amavasya.

good at singing or playing musical instruments or dancing, or good at any art, can realize God quickly if he makes the effort.

Advice to the people associated with the play and the soldiers of Chanak – the yoga of practice – remember death

"You should practice concentrating the mind on God as hard as you practice singing, playing musical instruments and dance. You have to practice worship, japa and meditation regularly.[1]

"Are you married? Do you have children?"

Vidya: "Sir, I lost a daughter. I have another child."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You had her and already lost her. You're so young! As the saying goes, 'The husband died in the evening. How long shall I cry into the night?' (*All laugh.*)

"You have experienced worldly happiness. It's like a hog-plum, only pit and skin. If you eat it, you'll get an upset stomach.

"It's fine that you work with a troupe. But there is trouble in that too. You are very young now, so you have a round face. After a time, it will wrinkle. People connected with the theatre are all like that: with hollows in their cheeks and big bellies and a band of strings on their arms.[2]

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1. abhyāsayogena tato māmicchāptuṁ dhanañjaya
gītā 12-9
[…then by abhyasa-yoga, you seek to reach Me, O Dhananjaya.]
2. Amulets or armlets.

"Why did I watch the Vidyasundar play? I noticed that the beat, the rhythm and the music were beautiful. Then the Divine Mother showed me that Narayana had assumed the forms of the actors."

Vidya: "Sir, what is the difference between lust[1] and desire[2]?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Lust is like the root of a tree and desires are like its branches and leaves.

"These six enemies – lust, anger, greed and the rest – will not go away entirely. That's why you have to turn them towards God. If you have to nurse a desire, if you have to be greedy, then desire love for God and be greedy for Him. If you have to be ego-centered, if you have to be proud, be intoxicated with the idea and proud of the fact that you are a servant of God, a child of God.

"Unless you give your whole mind to Him, you can't reach Him."

Union with God comes when desire for worldly enjoyment is over – brotherly love and the world

"The mind's energies are wasted on 'lust and greed'. Look, you have a son and a daughter. You're an actor in the theatre. A person can't achieve union with God in the middle of all these activities.

"When you have desire for worldly enjoyment, desire for union with God is diluted. There is suffering as long as there is desire for worldly enjoyment. The Srimad Bhagavata says, 'The

1. Kama.
2. Kamana.

Avadhuta chose a kite[1] to be one of his twenty-four gurus. The kite had a fish in its beak, so thousands of crows surrounded it. Whichever way the kite went with the fish in its beak, the crows followed, cawing all the time. When the fish suddenly dropped from the kite's mouth, all the crows flew toward the fish, leaving the kite alone.[2]

"The fish stands for objects of enjoyment and the crows are worries and anxieties. Wherever there is desire for worldly enjoyment, there are worries and anxieties. You can attain peace only when you give up worldly enjoyment.

"And look, money itself becomes a reason for trouble. Brothers are good to each other, but when property is divided, problems arise between them. Dogs lick each other and have good feelings toward each other – but when a householder throws a little rice, they begin to fight.

"Do come here now and then. (*Then pointing to M. and the others*) They visit on Sundays or on other holidays."

Vidya: "Our Sunday lasts for three months with the month of Shravana, Bhadra and Paush – the rainy season and when the paddy is harvested. We are lucky to be able to visit you. Just before I came to Dakshineswar I heard about two people – you and Jnanarnava."

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1. Osprey.
2. sāmiṣaṁ kuraraṁ jaghnurbalino'nye nirāmiṣāḥ,
tadāmiṣaṁ parityajya sa sukhaṁ samavindata।
śrīmadbhāgavata 11-9-2

Sri Ramakrishna: "Be a friend to your brothers, live in harmony. Everything is nice to hear and see if there is harmony. Have you seen it in a play? If four or five people sing a different tune, the performance is destroyed."

Vidya: "A bunch of birds get caught in a net. If they fly together to take the net in one direction, they are saved. But if they all fly in different directions, that doesn't happen.

"But in a play you also see a person dancing and at the same time balancing a brass pitcher on his head."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Live in the world, but balance the pitcher properly – in other words, keep your mind on God.

"I said to the soldiers at Chanak, 'Do your duties in the world, but bear in mind that the pestle of death can fall on you.'

"In Kamarpukur the women of carpenter families use a husking machine to flatten rice. One woman presses one end of the wooden beam with her foot and the other woman spreads the paddy into a mortar with her hand. She is careful that the pestle doesn't fall on her hand. At the same time, she nurses her baby. And with all this, she talks to a buyer: 'You owe us so much. Please come and pay us.'

"Keep your mind on God and at the same time attend to your many duties of the world. But you have to practice, and you have to be careful. Only then can you take care of both things."

Way to realize the Self, or God: holy company, not science

Vidya: "Sir, what is the proof that the soul [the Atman] is separate from the body?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Proof? God can be seen. If you practice austerities, you can see Him, through His grace. The rishis had the direct perception of the Atman. You can't understand the essence of God from science. In science there is only this: Mix this with that and such and such a thing will happen. Mixing that with this, it does happen, and in this way, you get information about all things connected with sense objects.

"That's why you can't understand spiritual things with the help of this kind of intellect. You need to keep the company of holy people. Associating with a physician, you learn how to feel the pulse."

Vidya: "I understand it now."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You have to practice spiritual disciplines. Only then can you attain your objective. It doesn't help to memorize verses of the scriptures. By repeating 'Hemp, hemp,' you don't get intoxicated. You have to swallow the hemp.

"It's not possible to explain to people the experience of God. You can't explain to a five-year-old child the joy that a husband and a wife share."

Vidya (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Sir, how do you realize the Atman?"

Sri Ramakrishna's motherly attitude toward Rakhal

Just then Rakhal is about to sit down to eat but because there are so many people in the room, he hesitates. These days Thakur is treating Rakhal just like a mother treats her child, just like Mother Yashoda and Gopala.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Rakhal*): "Oh, do eat. These people will stand aside. (*To a devotee*) Keep some ice for Rakhal. (*To Rakhal*) Do you want to go to Vanhooghly? Don't go in this hot sun."

Rakhal sits down to eat. Thakur again talks to the young man who acted the part of Vidya in the musical.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vidya*): "Why didn't you all take prasad from the temple? You could have eaten here."

Vidya: "Sir, not everybody feels the same way. So they cook food in a separate kitchen. Not everybody wants to eat at the guesthouse."

Rakhal sits down to eat. Thakur talks with the devotees on the verandah.

Chapter II

The actor in the play and spiritual practice in the household – way to realize God

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the actor Vidya*): "The means to God-realization is deep longing. Make the effort with your body, with your mind, with your speech. When there is too much bile in the body, a person suffers from jaundice. Everything looks yellow. Yellow is the only colour you see – in everything.

"Among you actors, a person who only plays the role of a woman develops a feminine nature. In the same way, if you meditate on God day and night, you acquire the nature of God.

"Dip your mind in any colour and it will take on that colour. The mind is like a freshly laundered cloth."

Vidya: "So you have to send it to be washed once."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. At first you have to purify the heart.[1] Then if you keep it occupied with thoughts of God, it will take that colour. But if you live a householder's life and only keep it on acting, the mind will be coloured by that."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with Hari (Swami Turiyananda), Narayan, and other devotees

Before Sri Ramakrishna could rest more than a few minutes, Hari, Narayan, and Narendra Bannerji, the son of Rajkrishan Bannerji and a Sanskrit teacher at Presidency College, arrive from Calcutta. Because of problems at home, Narendra Bannerji lives in a separate house in Shyampukur with his wife and son. He is a very simple man, twenty-nine or thirty years old. When he meditates, he hears the sound of bells and other temple instruments. He had traveled in Bhutan, the northwest, and several other places. He comes to visit Thakur now and then. (He spent his last days in Allahabad and passed away at the age of fifty-eight.)

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1. Chitta.

Hari (Swami Turiyananda) lives with his brothers at their Baghbazar house. Having studied for the matriculation examination at the General Assembly School, he now spends his time in contemplation of God, studying the scriptures and in practicing yoga. He comes to Dakshineswar to see Sri Ramakrishna now and then. When Thakur goes to Balaram's house in Baghbazar, he often sends for him.

On Buddhism – Brahman is the nature of knowledge – Totapuri's instruction to Thakur

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "I've heard a lot about Buddha Deva. He's one of the ten incarnations of God. Brahman is immovable, changeless, inactive and the nature of knowledge. When the intellect merges into the awareness of knowledge, a person attains Brahmajnana – then he becomes *buddha*, enlightened.

"The Naked One used to say, 'The mind merges into the intellect and the intellect into the nature of knowledge.'

"As long as I-ness persists, a person doesn't attain the knowledge of Brahman. Only after gaining the knowledge of Brahman and having the vision of God can you get I-ness under control. Otherwise, you can't control it. It's difficult to catch your shadow, but when the sun is overhead, your shadow is no farther away than half a cubit."

Instruction to Bannerji – God's vision – company of the holy is the way

A Devotee: "What is the vision of God like?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Haven't you seen a theatrical performance? People are talking with each other –

but as soon as the curtain is raised, everybody's mind turns completely to the play on the stage – it doesn't wander away. This is called being absorbed in samadhi.

"When the curtain drops again, the attention turns to external things. When the curtain of maya drops, the mind of a man again turns outward."

(*To Narendra Bannerji*): "You've traveled to many places. Tell us something about the sadhus."

> Bannerji had seen two yogis in Bhutan who used to drink a pound of bitter neem juice every day. This is the kind of thing he talked about. Also, he had gone to the ashram of a holy man on the bank of the Narmada. Seeing a Bengali gentleman dressed in trousers, the sadhu had said, "He's carrying a dagger next to his belly."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Listen. You should keep pictures of holy men in your room. They will inspire you."

Bannerji: "I have a picture of you in my room, and one of a sadhu on a hill. He's holding a pipe with burning hemp in it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, a person is inspired by seeing pictures of sadhus. A custard apple carved out of soft wood brings to mind a real custard apple. It's the same as being aroused by the sight of a young woman.

"That's why I say to you, you need the company of sadhus constantly.

(*To Bannerji*) "You're already seeing the fire of the world. A fire blazes whenever you indulge in

enjoyment. As long as the kite kept the fish in its beak, one flock of crows after another tormented it.

"A person finds peace in the company of sadhus. A crocodile stays under water a long time. It comes up to the surface from time to time to breathe deeply. Then it is at peace."

Actor and God, the wish-fulfilling tree – the danger of prayer with a motive

Actor: "Sir, you've talked about enjoyment. What you say is right. If you pray to God for enjoyment, you will get into trouble. How many wishes and desires are in the mind! But not all of them bring happiness. God is the wish-fulfilling tree. Whatever you pray for, you will get. But thinking that God is the wish-fulfilling tree, you might wish to test whether or not a tiger will come at your asking. As soon as the idea of a tiger comes to mind, it comes and devours you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You must understand that the tiger does come.

"What more can I say? Turn your mind to God. Do not forget God. If you call upon Him sincerely, He will reveal Himself.

"There is another thing. At the end of your performance, you must chant the name of Lord Hari. In this way, those who listen will return home thinking of God."

The actors offer their salutations and leave.

Sri Ramakrishna and advice to devotees on the household ashram

The wives of two devotees enter and salute Thakur. They have fasted in preparation for seeing him. They are the wives of two brothers, sisters-in-law. They are wearing veils. They are twenty-two or twenty-three years old and each has a son.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the wives*): "Look, worship Shiva. There is a book on how to worship him called *Nityakarma*. Study it. Then you will be able to engage your minds for a long time preparing for the worship: picking flowers, making sandalpaste, cleaning the utensils of worship, arranging offerings. By doing all this, your mind will be directed. You will get rid of meanness, attachment, anger and so on. When you two sisters-in-law talk, talk only about God."

Sri Ramakrishna and the value of image worship

"You have to unite your mind with God in whatever way you can. See that you don't forget Him even once – it should be like an unbroken flow of oil – no break in it. Even if you worship a brick or a stone as God, with a spirit of love and devotion, you can see Him by His grace.

"As I said before, you should worship Shiva the way I told you. When you become established in that, you don't have to continue formal worship. Then the mind will always be united with Him. Then you always remember Him and think of Him."

Elder sister-in-law (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Will you give us some instruction?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately*): "I don't initiate with a mantra. When you initiate a person, you have to take on yourself the sins of the disciple. The Mother of the Universe has kept me in the state of a child. I told you about Shiva Puja. Just perform that. And come here now and then. We will see what His will is later on. Try to come again on the day of Snanyatra.[1]

"I asked you to chant the name of Hari. Are you doing that?"

Sister-in-law (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why did you fast before coming here? You should have eaten something before you came. Women are the image of my Mother,[2] so I can't bear to see them suffer. Each of you is a different image of the Mother of the Universe. Come here after you have eaten and you will be happy."

Saying this, Thakur asks Ramlal to give the ladies seats and offer them refreshments. They are served the prasad of the Phalaharini Puja – luchis, different kinds of fruit, sweets and a glass of sweetened water.

Thakur says, "You have had something to eat. Now my mind is at peace. I can't bear to see women fast."

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1. The Bathing Festival.
2. striyaḥ samastāḥ sakalā jagatsu
caṇḍī 11-6
[O Devi,] all the women in the world are your aspects.]

Chapter IV

Secret conversation with devotees – Keshab Sen

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on a step of the Shiva temples. It is 5 p.m. Adhar, Dr. Nitai, M. and a couple of other devotees are sitting near him.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "You see, my nature is changing."

As if he is going to talk about something secret, he comes down a step and sits beside the devotees. Then he talks to them.

The human being is the highest creation of God – the secret of divine incarnation

"You are devotees. I'm not afraid to tell you. These days I don't see the spirit-form of God. Now I only see Him in the concrete form of a human being. It's my nature to see, touch and embrace Him. But now He says to me, 'You have assumed a body. Enjoy me in human forms, in a concrete form.'

"God certainly resides in all beings, but there is greater manifestation of Him in man.

"Is man something insignificant, brother? Man can think of God, he can meditate on the Infinite. Other living beings can't do this.

"He is present in other beings – in plants and trees, in all elements – but there is greater manifestation of God in a human being.

"The essence of fire is in all beings, in all things – but there is greater manifestation in wood.

"Rama said to Lakshmana, 'Look brother, an elephant is such a big animal – but it can't think of God.'

"Then again, there is a greater manifestation of Him in an incarnation of God. Rama said to Lakshmana, 'Brother, when you see deep ecstasy[1] in a man – laughing, weeping, dancing and singing – know for certain that I am there.'"

Thakur is now quiet. After a few minutes, he speaks again.

Sri Ramakrishna's influence on Keshab Sen

Sri Ramakrishna: "Keshab Sen used to come here quite frequently. Since he first came he's changed a lot. Now he's quite a remarkable man. He's brought his group here several times. But he also wanted to see me alone. Before, Keshab never had the opportunity of holy company.

"I met him in his Colootola house. Hriday was with me. We were taken to the room where Keshab was sitting. He was at a table writing something. After a long time, he put down his pen and came down from his chair to sit with us. He didn't salute us or give any other kind of greeting.

"He used to visit me here now and then. One day in a spiritual mood I said to him, 'You shouldn't sit with one leg on the other before a holy man. It increases rajas in a person. Whenever he came, I saluted him and his friends. They gradually learned to salute, bending their foreheads toward the ground."

1. Urjita bhakti.

Repeating the name of Hari and the Divine Mother's name in the Brahmo Samaj – vision of God in the heart of a devotee

"And I said to Keshab, 'Chant the name of Hari. You should sing His glories in the Kaliyuga.' They began to do it with the accompaniment of drums and cymbals.

"How did my faith in the name of Hari grow? Sadhus visit this temple from time to time. One of them from Multan came. He was waiting for pilgrims going to Gangasagar. (*Pointing to M.*) About the same age as he is. It was he who said, 'There is a way: the path of devotion taught by the rishi Narada.'"

Advice to Keshab – 'lust and greed' is the basket smelling of fish – company of the holy, fragrance of flowers – practicing spiritual disciplines in solitude now and then

"Keshab came here one day and stayed till ten at night. Pratap and some others said, 'Let's stay the night.' They were sitting under the banyan tree (in the Panchavati). Keshab said, 'No. I have some work to do. We have to leave.'

"At that, I laughed and said, 'So you won't be able to sleep without the smell of your fish basket? A fishwife was a guest in a gardener's house. She had come back from selling fish with her basket in hand. She was given the flower room to sleep in. But she couldn't get to sleep until late at night because of the fragrance of the flowers. Seeing her plight, the mistress of the house asked her, 'Why are you so restless?' The fishwife answered, 'I don't know, sister. Maybe I can't sleep because of the

fragrance of the flowers. Could you bring me my fish basket? Maybe, I can sleep then.' When the basket was brought to her, she sprinkled some water on it and put it close to her nose. Then she fell sound asleep, snoring loudly.

"Hearing the story, Keshab's group burst out laughing.

"At dusk Keshab conducted worship at the river ghat. After the worship, I said to Keshab, 'Look here, in one way, God has become the Bhagavata, so you should worship the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras. He has also become a devotee. The heart of a devotee is His living room. You can easily find the owner of the house in his living room.' So by worshipping a devotee, you worship God.

"Keshab and his followers listened with great concentration. A full moon flooded the area with its light. They were all sitting just above the stairs leading to the Ganges. I said, 'Let's all chant *Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan*.'

"Everyone chanted together, '*Bhagavata-Bhakta-Bhagavan*.' Then I said, 'Brahman is Primal Power and Primal Power is Brahman.' Those people again repeated in one voice, 'Brahman is Primal Power, Primal Power is Brahman.' I said to them, 'Whom you call Brahman, I call Mother. Mother is a very sweet name.'

"Then I said to them, 'Say this too: Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava.' At this, Keshab said, 'Not that far, sir. Then people will think of us as orthodox Vaishnavas.'

"Sometimes I'd say to Keshab, 'Whom you call Brahman, I call Shakti, the Primal Power.' What is beyond mind and speech, attributeless and inactive, the Vedas call Brahman. When I see creation, preservation and destruction, I call it Shakti, the Primal Power.

"I said to Keshab, 'It's very difficult to succeed leading a worldly life. How can a person recover delirium if he's put in a room where there is pickle, tamarind and a water pitcher? So from time to time it's necessary to go into solitude to practice spiritual disciplines. When the trunk of a tree grows thick, you can tie even an elephant to it. But when it's just a sapling, a goat or a cow can eat it up. That's why Keshab said in a lecture, 'Get established strongly in spiritual life – and then live in the world.'"

Advice to Adhar, M., Nitai and others – go forward

(*To the devotees*): "You see, Keshab was a very learned man. He lectured in English and many people respected him. Queen Victoria herself talked to him. But when he came here, he would be bare-bodied. When you go to meet a holy man, you should take something for him – so he used to bring me some fruit in his hand. He had no pride at all.

(*To Adhar*) "Look, you are so learned and you are a Deputy Magistrate. But you are under the power of a snub-nosed[1] woman**.** Go forward. Beyond the sandalwood are better things: silver mines, gold mines, and then diamonds and precious gems. A

1. Hen-pecked.

woodcutter was chopping wood when a brahmachari said to him, 'Go forward.'"

Coming down the steps of the Shiva Temples, Sri Ramakrishna goes toward his room through the courtyard. Adhar, M. and some other devotees are with him. Just then, Ram Chatterji, the priest of the Vishnu Temple, comes and gives news that the attendant [maidservant] of Holy Mother has contracted cholera.

Ram Chatterji (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "I told you about this at ten o'clock but you didn't listen."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What could I do?"

Ram Chatterji: "What could you do? Rakhal, Ramlal, all of them, were there. But they did nothing."

M.: "Kishori (Gupta) has gone to Alambazar to get medicine."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What, has he gone alone? Where is he getting it?"

M.: "Nobody went with him. He'll get it in Alambazar."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Please tell whoever's nursing the patient what they have to do in case she gets worse and what she should eat when she gets better."

M.: "Yes, sir."

The devotee's sisters-in-law come again and offer their salutations. They ask for permission to leave. Sri Ramakrishna says to them again, "Please perform worship the way I told you. And come here

after eating something. Otherwise, I feel bad. Try to come again on the Snanyatra day."

Chapter V

Instruction to Bannerji – wife is the reason for worldly life – take refuge in God

Sri Ramakrishna is now sitting on the western semi-circular verandah. Bannerji, Hari, M. and some others are sitting with him. Thakur knows that Bannerji has some family problems.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Look, all problems that exist are just 'for a loin-cloth.' You are married and have children, so you have to have a job. A sadhu is worried about his loin-cloth and a householder about his wife. On top of that, you don't get along well with everyone at home so you have to live separately. (*Smiling*) Chaitanya Deva said to Nitai, 'Listen, brother Nityananda. A man caught in the world is never free.'"

M. (*to himself*): "Maybe Thakur is talking about the world of delusion. Maybe a worldly man lives in a world of ignorance."

Sri Ramakrishna (*pointing to M. and smiling*): "He is also living in a separate house. 'Who are you, sir?' 'I am an expatriate.' 'And who are you, Sir?' 'I am separated from my beloved.' (*All laugh.*) You will get along well.

"But there's no danger if you take refuge in God. He will save you Himself."

Hari and others: "Well, why does it take so many people so long to find Him?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You know what the reason is? A person doesn't feel yearning for God until all work and desire for enjoyment are over. A physician says, 'Let a few days pass. Then the ordinary medicine will do him good.'

"Narada said to Rama, 'Rama, how can Ravana be killed if you stay in Ayodhya? You have come down to earth for that purpose.' Rama said, 'Narada, let the right time come. Let Ravana's past actions begin to bear fruit. Then the ground will be prepared for killing him.'"[1]

The problem of evil and Hari (Swami Turiyananda), Thakur's the state of vijnani

Hari: "Well, why is there so much suffering in the world?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "This world is like play. In this game there is sorrow and happiness, virtue and vice, knowledge and ignorance, good and bad – everything. If there were no sorrow, no sin, the play couldn't go on.

"In the game of blind man's buff you have to touch the granddame. If you touch her in the beginning of the game, she is not pleased. God [the granddame] wills that the play continue for some time. After that:

> Among a hundred thousand kites only one or two break free.
>
> And then, O Mother, how you laugh and clap your hands!

"In other words, after practicing a lot of austerities, one or two attain the vision of God and

1. *Adhyatma Ramayana*, Ayodhyakanda.

are liberated by His grace. The Divine Mother then claps in joy: 'There! It's cut free!'"

Hari: "This game is death to us."

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "Just tell me who *you* are; it is God Himself who dwells in everything – maya, living beings, the world and the twenty four cosmic principles.[1]

"'I bite becoming a snake and cure becoming a doctor.' He has become both knowledge and ignorance and dwells in the world. He dwells as ignorance in the maya of delusion, and He cures in the form of the maya of knowledge, in the guru.

"There are ignorance, knowledge[2] and supreme knowledge.[3] A man of knowledge sees that He alone exists, that He is the doer, creating, preserving and dissolving. The man of supreme knowledge sees that He exists and dwells in the world as all.

"When you attain ecstatic love[4] for God, you see that there is nothing besides Him.

"Compared to ecstasy, devotion is very weak. And then ecstasy matures into ecstatic love for God.

(*To Bannerji*) "Do you still hear the sound of a bell when you meditate?"

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1. tvaṁ strī tvaṁ pumānasi tvaṁ kumāra uta vā kumārī ।
tvaṁ jīrṇo daṇḍena vañcasi tvaṁ jāto bhavasi viśvatomukhaḥ ।।
śvetāśvatara upaniṣat 4-3
[You are the woman, You are the man, You are the boy, (and) You are the girl too. You are the old man tottering with a stick. Taking birth, You have Your faces everywhere.]
2. Jnana.
3. Vijnana.
4. Mahabhava and prema.

Bannerji: "I do hear the same sound, every day. And I have visions of His form as well. Once the mind has experienced this, does it ever stop?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Yes, when once firewood catches fire, it doesn't cool down. (*To the devotees*) He knows a lot about faith."

Bando [Bannerji]: "My faith is very deep."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why not talk about it?"

Bannerji: "Once a guru gave a mantra of the ram to someone. He told the man that the ram was his ideal. The fellow attained perfection by repeating that mantra of the ram.

"And a grass cutter crossed the Ganges by repeating the name of Rama."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Bring the women of your family to meet the women of Balaram's."

Bannerji: "Which Balaram?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Don't you know Balaram? He lives in Bosepara."

Sri Ramakrishna is filled with joy to meet a guileless man. Bannerji is very simple. Sri Ramakrishna is also very fond of Niranjan because he is so guileless.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Why did I ask you to see Niranjan? I told you to find out if it's true that he's a man of guileless heart."

Section XVI

Birthday Celebration for Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar – Joyful Kirtan with Narendra and Other Devotees

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the long northeastern verandah at the Dakshineswar Temple, listening to the songs relating to Gopigoshtha and Subol Milan. Narottam is singing. Today is Sunday, 22 February 1885, 12th day of Phalgun 1291 (B.Y.), the eighth day of the bright fortnight of the lunar month. The devotees are celebrating Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. According to the lunar calendar, it fell on the 2nd of the bright fortnight of Phalgun, last Monday. Narendra, Rakhal, Bhavanath, Surendra, Girindra, Binode, Hazra, Ramlal, Ram, Nityagopal, Mani Mallick, Girish, Mahendra Kaviraj of Sinthi and many other devotees have assembled. The kirtan has been going on since early morning. It is now about eight o'clock. M. enters and salutes Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur motions to him to sit near him.

Listening to the singing, Sri Ramakrishna has become filled with emotion. Sri Krishna is late in bringing the cows to pasture. One of the cowherd boys says, "Mother Yashoda is keeping him from coming." Balai says sharply, "I'll blow a horn and bring Kanai here." Balai's love for him is deep.

The musicians continue. Sri Krishna is playing his flute. As the milkmaids and cowherds listen, different moods arise in their minds.

Thakur sits with the devotees and listens to the singing. Suddenly his glance falls on Narendra, who is sitting close to him. Thakur stands up and goes into samadhi. He touches Narendra's knee with one foot. Returning to normal consciousness, Thakur sits down again. Narendra leaves the room. The kirtan goes on.

Sri Ramakrishna whispers to Baburam, "There's pudding[1] in the room. Please go and give some to Narendra."

Is Thakur seeing the very presence of God in Narendra?

At the end of the kirtan Sri Ramakrishna returns to his room. He feeds Narendra affectionately with sweets.

Girish believes that God has come down to earth in the form of Sri Ramakrishna.

Girish (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "All your actions are like Sri Krishna's – the way he used to pose before Yashoda."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, because Sri Krishna was an incarnation of God. Playing as a human being, He acts like this. Even while he lifted the Govardhan hill (on his hand), he pretended to Nanda[2] that he found it difficult to pick up a footstool.[3]"

Girish: "I'm sure I understand you now."

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1. Kshir.
2. His father.
3. Pidda.

Sri Ramakrishna puts on new clothes for his birthday – service rendered to him by devotees – in samadhi

Thakur is sitting on the smaller cot. It is about eleven o'clock. Ram and other devotees want to dress Thakur in a new cloth. Thakur says, "No, no." Pointing to a person educated in English, he says, "What will he say about it?" When the devotees insist, Thakur says, "If you insist, I'll do it."

The devotees are making arrangements for Thakur's meal in the room.

Thakur asks Narendra to sing. Narendra sings:

In dense darkness, O Mother, Your formless beauty sparkles. And so the yogi meditates in a dark mountain cave.

In the lap of infinite darkness, on the waves of the great silence,[1] eternal peace and joy float without end.

Putting on the form of the Formless One, in darkness draped, O Mother, who are You, seated alone in boundless bliss?

At the lotus of Your fear-dispelling feet flashes the lightning of love, while loud and earth-shaking laughter issues from Your dazzling face.

What wondrous beauty, what an enchanting face I see!

The Lord of my soul has entered my humble hut, and the spring of love wells forth.

O Lord, beloved of my heart, what treasure shall I offer You?

Accept my soul, accept my life; whatever I have, accept all that from me.

As Narendra sings, "O Mother, who are You, seated alone in boundless bliss?" Thakur

1. Nirvana.

immediately loses all outer consciousness and goes into deep samadhi. After a long time, when he returns to normal, the devotees make him sit for his meal. He is still absorbed in ecstasy and eats rice but with both hands. He says to Bhavanath, "Please feed me." He is still in an ecstatic mood and is unable to feed himself. Bhavanath feeds him.

Thakur eats a little. Then Ram says, "Nityagopal will eat from your leaf plate."

Sri Ramakrishna: "From the plate? Why?"

Ram: "Can't he eat from your leaf plate if you say he can?"

Seeing Nityagopal in an ecstatic mood, Thakur feeds him one or two morsels

By this time the devotees of Konnagar have arrived by boat. They enter the room singing kirtan. After singing, they go out for refreshments. A singer, Narottam, is in the room. Thakur says to him, "Their music is like they're pushing a boat in the river. The music should be such that everybody wants to dance. You should sing like this:

O Brother, because of the intensity of Gaur's ecstatic love, the village of Nadia is swaying.

(*To Narottam*) "And this should be added to it."

Behold the two brothers[1] who shed tears on chanting Hari's name have come.

They who ask for prema (ecstatic love) even after receiving blows, these two brothers have come.

They who are Kanai and Balai of Vraja, these two brothers have come.

1. Gauranga and Nityananda.

They who embrace even the pariah, these two brothers have come.

And you should sing this too.

O Lord, Gaur and Nitai, you two brothers are so full of compassion.

You even raise the *chandala* up in your arms and utter *Haribol*[1] to him with so much compassion, O Lord of the indigent.

Chapter II

Conversation with devotees during the birthday celebration

The devotees now eat the sacrificial food. They are happy to have the flattened fried rice,[2] sweets and some other kinds of food. Thakur says to M., "Didn't you invite the Mukherjis? Please ask Surendra to feed the musicians."

Bepin Sarkar has come. A devotee says, "This is Bepin Sarkar." Thakur sits up and says humbly, "Give him a seat and offer him a betel leaf." He says to him, "I can't talk to you. There's such a big crowd."

Seeing Girindra, Thakur says to Baburam, "Give him a seat." Seeing that Nityagopal is squatting, Thakur says, "And him too."

Mahendra, the kaviraj[3] from Sinthi, has arrived. Smiling, Thakur points to Rakhal and says, "Show him your pulse."

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1. To chant the name of Lord Hari.
2. *Chinre.*
3. Ayurvedic physician.

He says to Ramlal, "Make friends with Girish Ghosh. Then you'll be able to go to the theatre [free of charge]." *(Laughter.)*

Narendra has been talking a long time to Hazra on the verandah. Since the death of Narendra's father, there are great troubles with his family. Narendra comes in the room and sits down.

Thakur gives Narendra various instructions

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra*): "Were you sitting with Hazra? You are 'a foreigner' and he is a 'woman separated from her lover.' Hazra also needs one and a half thousand rupees. *(Laughter.)*

"Hazra says, 'Narendra has developed sixteen annas[1] of sattva guna, but he still has a little red raja guna in him. I am seventeen annas of pure sattva.' (*All laugh.*)

"When I say, 'You are dry because you only reason,' he says, 'I'm dry because I drink the nectar of the sun.'

"When I talk to him about pure love for God, when I say that a pure devotee doesn't want money and wealth and splendour, he says, 'When the flood of His grace rises, not only will streams be flooded, but even canals and pools will be filled with water. A person gains pure devotion and also the six splendours. And money too.'"

Narendra and many other devotees are sitting on the floor in Thakur's room. Girish enters and takes a seat.

1. One-hundred percent.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "I regard Narendra as the very essence of Atman. And I obey him."

Girish: "Who do you not obey?"

Narendra belongs to the Supreme Abode

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "He has a manly nature and I have a feminine nature. Narendra has a high spiritual ideal – the abode of Indivisible Brahman."

Girish goes out for a smoke.

Narendra (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "I had a talk with Girish Ghosh about you. He's a great man."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What did you say about me?"

Narendra: "That you don't know how to read and write and we are all learned – this is the drift of the conversation." *(Laughter.)*

Sri Ramakrishna and Narendra – scholarship and scriptures

Mani Mallick (*to Thakur*): "You are learned without being literate."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra and others*): "To tell you the truth, I haven't studied Vedanta or other scriptures, but I'm not a bit sorry about it. I know the essence of Vedanta: Brahman is real and the world is an illusion. And what is the essence of the Gita? That when you go on repeating the word *Gita* ten times, you get *tyagi*, *tyagi*.[1]

1. Renunciation.

"A person should know the essence of the scriptures from the lips of a guru, but then practice spiritual disciplines. Somebody wrote a letter. Before it was read, it got lost. Everybody began to look for it. When they found the letter, they read that five seers of sandesh and a dhoti had to be bought. They threw the letter away and began to collect five seers of sandesh and a dhoti. In the same way, when you know the essence of the scriptures, what further need do you have to read the book? Now you have to practice spiritual disciplines.[1]"

Girish enters the room.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "Hello! What were you saying about me? I just eat, drink and live."

Girish: "What else should we say about you? Are you a sadhu?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "I'm no sadhu. Truly, I don't feel like I am."

Girish: "Even in joke, I can't compete with you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I went to Jaygopal Sen's garden house wearing a red-bordered dhoti. Keshab Sen was there. Seeing my red-bordered dhoti, he said, 'That's a lot of colour today – so much red border!' I said, 'I have to distract Keshab's mind, so I have come like a spring festival.'

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1. tameva dhīro vijñāya prajñāṁ kurvīta brāhmaṇaḥ,
nānudhyādbahūñchabdān vāco viglāpanaṁ hi tat.
bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 4-4-21
[The intelligent aspirant after Brahman, knowing about this alone, should attain intuitive knowledge. He should not think of too many words, for it is particularly fatiguing to the organ of speech.]

Narendra is going to sing now. Sri Ramakrishna asks M. to take down the tanpura. Narendra tunes it for a long time. Thakur and the others become impatient.

Binode says, "Today it will be tuned and another day we'll hear the song." (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna laughs and says, "I feel like breaking it. Only *tang, tang* is being produced? It may be followed *by tana nana, nere tum*."

Bhavanath: "There's always impatience before a musical performance."

Narendra (*while tuning*): "When you don't understand."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "There! He's explained away all our complaints!"

Narendra's song and Sri Ramakrishna's ecstasy – inwardness and outwardness – still water and wave

Narendra sings. Thakur listens, sitting on the smaller cot, and Nityagopal and other devotees listen, sitting on the floor.

Song No.1

O the all-knowing Mother, You are always awake within me. Night and day You hold me in your arms.

Song No. 2

Sing O brother, the name of the Self of Joy. She, the one Reality,[1] brings peace to my mind.

1. Ektantri.

Song No. 3

In dense darkness, O Mother, Your formless beauty sparkles. And so the yogi meditates in a dark mountain cave.

Thakur, filled with ecstasy, comes down from the cot and sits near Narendra. He speaks while still in ecstasy.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Should I sing? Fie on it! (*To Nityagopal*) What do you think? You have to hear it before you're inspired. What happens after makes no difference.

"He has lit a fire. That's good. Then afterward it is quiet. I'm silent and you should also remain silent.

"The important thing is to be immersed in the nectar of joy.

"Should I sing? Well, I may. When water is still, it is water and when it is in waves, it is still water."

Advice to Narendra – go beyond knowledge and ignorance

Narendra is sitting near. His family at home is in trouble and he is always worried about them. He used to visit the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and still reasons about knowledge. He is interested in reading Vedanta and other holy books. He is about twenty-three years old. Thakur looks at him steadfastly.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to Narendra*): "You are *kha* (like space). If only you did not have this tax (worry at home). (*All laugh.*)

"Krishnakishore used to say, 'I am *kha*.' One day I went to his house and found him worried. He

wouldn't talk much. I asked him, 'Brother, what has happened? Why are you sitting so silently like this?' He said, 'The tax man came and warned me that if I didn't pay taxes, he would auction off all the pots and pans in my house. So I'm worried.' I laughed and said, 'How is that? You are '*kha*,' like the sky. What does it matter if the rascal comes and carries away your pots and pans?'

"So I say to you, 'You are only '*kha*'. Why do you worry so much? Do you know that Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, 'If you have even one of the eight occult powers, you can be a little powerful, but you will not be able to attain Me.' You can have power, strength, money and things like that through occult powers, but not God.

"And there's something else – go beyond knowledge and ignorance. Many people say that a certain person is a great man of knowledge, but in reality it is not so. Vasishtha was such a great jnani, but he lost his balance at the loss of his sons. Lakshmana said, 'Rama, this is strange! He is totally overwhelmed with sorrow.' Rama answered, 'Brother, the person who has knowledge also has ignorance. A person who is conscious of light also knows darkness. One who knows what is good also knows what is bad. The one who knows what happiness is also knows what sorrow is. Brother, go beyond both. Go beyond happiness and sorrow, knowledge and ignorance.' That's why I say to you, 'Go beyond knowledge and ignorance.'"

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees – advice to Surendra – family life and charity – mind yoga and action yoga

Sri Ramakrishna again sits on the smaller cot, the devotees near him on the floor. Surendra also sits near him. Thakur looks at him affectionately and, in the course of their conversation, advises him on many things.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Surendra*): "Come here now and then. The Naked One (Totapuri) used to say that a pot should be washed every day or it will get stained. It's necessary to keep the company of holy men often. A sannyasin has to renounce 'lust and greed', but that's not the path for you. You should occasionally go into solitude and call on God with a longing heart. You should renounce mentally.

"Unless you are a heroic devotee, you can't take care of both sides. King Janaka lived a worldly life after he had attained perfection through spiritual disciplines. He wielded two swords: one of knowledge and the other of action."

After saying this, Thakur sings:

This world is indeed a thing of joy; let me eat and drink and be merry.

King Janaka, the great royal sage, was he inferior in any respect to the holy man who has given up the world?

Oh no, it was he who was loyal to both matter and Spirit, who realized God and at the same time drank his cup of milk. *(Laughter.)*

"For you people, Chaitanya Deva's advice is best: compassion for the living, service, and chanting God's name and glories.

"Why do I say this? You work in a merchant's office. You have to attend to many things. That's why I say it to you.

"You tell lies at the office. So why do I eat the food you bring me? Because, you give in charity and also practice meditation. You give away more than you earn. 'A melon seed is larger than the fruit.'

"I can't eat food brought by a miser. Their money is squandered in a number of ways: first, in law-suits; second, in robbery or theft; third, in medical expenses; and then by the extravagance of bad children. This is how their money goes.

"It's very good that you give in charity and perform meditation. Whoever has money should give in charity. A miser's wealth is hidden away, but the wealth of a generous man is saved and spent in good causes. There in the countryside [Kamarpukur], farmers bring water to their fields by digging canals. Sometimes the flow of water is so forceful that it breaks the ridges and floods the fields. The crops are then destroyed. That's why the farmers make holes at places along the ridge. They are called 'muzzles.' The water runs out a little through them so the ridge doesn't wash away by the force of the water. Then a layer of silt covers the field. This layer makes the field very fertile and yields a very good crop. A charitable person reaps the four fruits of karma – virtue, wealth, fulfillment of legitimate desires and liberation."

All the devotees listen attentively to this instruction of Thakur on the virtue of charity

Surendra: "I can't meditate well. Now and then I repeat, 'Ma, Ma.' At bedtime I repeat, 'Ma, Ma' and fall asleep."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's enough. It is remembrance."

"Mano[1] yoga and Karma yoga. Performing worship, going on pilgrimage, service to living beings and so on under the guru's instruction is called karma yoga. The work Janaka used to perform is also called karma yoga. Mano yoga is what yogis do: remembering God and meditating on Him.

"When I go to the Kali Temple, I say to myself, 'Mother, you are the mind also.' Pure mind, pure intellect and pure Atman are one and the same thing."

It is almost dusk. Most of the devotees are returning home after saluting Thakur. He goes to the western verandah with Bhavanath and M.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bhavanath*): "Why do you come here so infrequently?"

Bhavanath (*smiling*): "I visit you once a fortnight. The other day I saw you on the road. That's why I didn't come then."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What are you saying? What use is it to just see each other? There should be touching and talking too."

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1. Mental yoga.

Chapter IV

Thakur with Girish and other devotees on the night of his birthday – in the joy of ecstasy

It is evening. The sounds of arati in the temples can be heard. Today is the 8th day of the bright fortnight of Phalgun. The Holi festival[1] will be held six or seven days later, on the next full moon.

The spires of the temple, the courtyard, the garden, the tree tops are beautifully lit by moonlight. The Ganges is flowing north by the temple, its surface bright with moonlight, as if with joy. Sri Ramakrishna, seated on the smaller cot, is meditating quietly on the Divine Mother.

One or two devotees are still here after the birthday celebration. Narendra had left earlier.

Arati is over. Absorbed in ecstasy, Thakur begins to pace the long southeastern verandah. M. stands watching him. Suddenly, Thakur says to him, "O, how beautifully Narendra sings!"

Meditation on Mahakali according to Tantra – the deep meaning of meditation

M.: "Sir, are you talking about the song beginning 'in dense darkness?'"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes. There's deep meaning in that song. It is still drawing my mind."

M.: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "To meditate in the dark is prescribed in the Tantra. Where is sunlight then?"

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1. Dol festival, a color-sprinkling ceremony.

Girish Ghosh comes in and stands near. Sri Ramakrishna sings the song:

Is my Mother black?

She is the image of death.

Naked, She is illumining my heart.

Thakur, as though intoxicated, stands there with a hand on Girish's body.

What need is there of going to the Ganges, Prabhas, Kashi and Kanchi if the lips can utter 'Kali, Kali' when my life ebbs away?

He who repeats 'Kali' in all the three sandhyas[1] needs no daily ritualistic worship.

Worship itself follows his footsteps but can never overtake him.

Charity, kindness and vows no longer appeal to him.

For Madan, the poet, all worship means the red feet of the Blissful Mother.

Who can know the qualities of the holy name of Kali,

The praises of which are sung by the God of gods, Mahadeva Himself?

Then he sings:

This time I have given my full attention.

I have learned divine fervour[2] from one well-versed in it.

O Mother, I have found a man from the country which has no night.

And now I can no longer distinguish day and night.

I have rendered barren all ritualistic devotions.

My sleep is broken. Why should I sleep anymore?

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1. At dawn, noon and twilight.
2. Bhava.

I am awake in the sacrifice of yoga.

Having received the sleep of yoga from You, I have put sleep to sleep.

I have given myself permanent colour with the help of borax and sulphur.[1]

Both eyes brush the floor of the temple of my mind.

Says Ramprasad: Knowing the truth that Kali is the Supreme Brahman,

I bowed before both bhakti and salvation, and gave up all ideas of what is righteousness[2] and what is unrighteousness.[3]

It seems that Thakur's joy of ecstasy increases as he looks at Girish. He sings more songs as he stands there:

I have surrendered myself at the Fearless feet of the Divine Mother. Am I afraid of Yama anymore?

I have tied to the top tuft of my hair the almighty mantra of the name of Kali,

Having sold my body in the mart of the world, I have bought the name of Durga.

And then:

I have planted the wish-fulfilling tree,[4] the name of Mother Kali, in my heart.

I am waiting to open my heart to Yama[5] to show him the name of Kali residing there.

I have thrown out the six bad beings[6] that were dwelling in my body.

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1. Borax and sulphur render paint permanent.
2. Dharma.
3. Adharma.
4. Kalpataru.
5. King of Death.
6. Six passions, namely lust, anger, avarice, delusion, pride and envy.

Says Ramprasad, I am prepared to start my journey of life, taking the name of Durga.

Intoxicated with feeling, Thakur continues to sing:

I have bought Sri Durga's name having sold my body in the market place of the world.

(*To Girish and other devotees*): "*Bhavate bhrala tanu haral ge jnana.* [Feelings of ecstasy fill my body and steal my consciousness.]

"That *jnana* means consciousness of the outside world. You need consciousness of Truth,[1] consciousness of Brahman.[2] The body becomes filled with divine ecstasy and you lose all body consciousness."

Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation of God? The state of a paramahamsa

"Love for God is the essence. There is love with a motive and there is also motiveless devotion, pure love and devotion, love that seeks no return. Keshab Sen and his group didn't know about motiveless love. In this love the devotee has no desire for return, he only has devotion for the lotus feet of the Lord.

"Then there is ecstatic love,[3] as if love for God is overflowing. 'The devotee laughs, weeps and dances in ecstasy' – it's like Chaitanya Deva's. Rama said

1. Tattva-jnana.
2. Brahmajnana.
3. Urjita bhakti.

to Lakshmana, 'Brother, wherever you find overflowing love, know that I am present."[1]

Is Thakur alluding to his own state? Is he an incarnation of God like Chaitanya Deva, come down to earth to teach mankind love for God?

Girish: "Everything is possible by your grace. Just think what I was before, and what I am now!"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well brother, you had good tendencies from past births. That's why it happened. Nothing happens before its time. When the time comes for a disease to be cured, the physician says, 'Grind this leaf with black pepper and take the powder.' The patient recovers. Who knows whether it was the medicine with black pepper which cured the patient, or it was spontaneous?

"Lakshmana said to Lava and Kusha,[2] 'You are children. You don't know Ramachandra. By the touch of his feet, the Ahalya who had been turned into a stone became a woman again.' Lava and Kusha said, 'Yes sir, we know all this. We've heard all about it.' A stone turned into a human being because of the words of a sage. The sage Gautama had said that in the age of Treta Ramachandra would pass by this ashrama. 'By the touch of his feet you will again turn into a human being.' Who can tell now whether it happened because of

1. śraddhāluratyūrjitabhaktilakṣaṇo yastasya dṛśyo'hamaharniśaṁ hṛdi adhyātma rāmāyaṇa - uttara kāṇḍa 5-58
[He who has deep faith and has great urjita bhakti, I am always visible to him in his heart.]

2. Rama's sons.

Rama's holiness or because of the words of the sage?

"Every single thing happens by the will of God. If you are becoming spiritually awakened here, please know me to be only the instrument. 'Uncle moon is the uncle of all.' Everything happens by the will of God."

Girish (*smiling*): "Yes, certainly by the will of God. That's what I'm saying." (*All laugh.*)

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "If a person is sincere, he realizes God soon. There are some who do not attain knowledge: One, a person who has a crooked mind – insincere. Two, one who is obsessed with external purity. And three, one who doubts.

Thakur praises Nityagopal's ecstatic condition.

There are still three or four devotees standing near Thakur on the long southeastern verandah, listening closely. He describes the state of a paramahamsa: "A paramahamsa always has the awareness that God is real and everything else is transitory. Only a swan can separate milk from water. If milk is mixed with water, the acid on its tongue can separate the milk from the water. A paramahamsa also has a similar acid, that of ecstatic love for God. Having such love, he can discriminate between the eternal and the transitory. He can experience God and see Him."

Section XVII

Conversation at Girish's House on Harmony of Knowledge and Devotion

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna is at Girish Ghosh's Bosepara house talking about spiritual things with the devotees. It is three o'clock. M. arrives and salutes him by prostrating on the ground. Today is Wednesday, 25 February 1885, 15th of Phalgun, the 11th day of the bright fortnight. Last Sunday Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was celebrated at Dakshineswar. Today, after visiting Girish's house, Thakur is going to see a play by Vrishaketu at the Star Theatre.

Thakur arrived only a short time ago. M. had arrived late, having been delayed by finishing some work. Reaching Girish's, M. sees that Thakur is talking enthusiastically about the harmony of the knowledge of the Absolute and the essence of love for God.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish and other devotees*): "To be awake, to dream and to be in deep sleep – these are the three states of an individual's consciousness.

"People who reason and discriminate don't acknowledge these three states. They say that Brahman is beyond the gross, subtle and causal states – beyond the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. Everything is maya, they say, like the reflection in a mirror. The reflection has no

substance. Only Brahman has substance, everything else is illusory.[1]

"The knowers of Brahman say also that you see duality because of body-consciousness – you feel that even the reflection is real. When this identification is gone,[2] you experience So 'ham – I am That Brahman."

A Devotee: "So is that what we should do? Follow the path of reasoning?"

Girish and two paths – reason and love for God – Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga

Sri Ramakrishna: "There is the path of reasoning. Jnana Yoga. It is the path of the Vedantists. The other path is devotion. Bhakti Yoga. If a devotee weeps longingly for the knowledge of Brahman, he can attain it too.

"You can attain the knowledge of Brahman by following either path. Some people retain love for God even after attaining the knowledge of Brahman, to teach others. For example, incarnations of God.

"But it's not easy to get rid of body-consciousness, I-consciousness. It goes away only by His grace when you attain samadhi – nirvikalpa samadhi[3] and jada samadhi.[4]

"The 'I' of an incarnation of God returns after attaining samadhi – the 'I' of wisdom, the 'I' of a

1. Mandukya Upanishad.
2. That is, the identification of oneself with the body/mind.
3. The highest state of samadhi, total oneness with Brahman.
4. Union with God in which one is inert and appears lifeless.

devotee. It is by this 'I' of wisdom that he can teach. Shankaracharya retained this 'I' of wisdom.

"Chaitanya Deva used to taste love of God with this 'I' and lived with love of God and devotees, talking about spiritual things and chanting God's name.

"'I-ness' doesn't die easily. So a devotee doesn't reject the states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep as unreal – he accepts all the states. He also accepts the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. A devotee sees that it is these qualities that have become the twenty-four cosmic principles, that they are the world and its creatures. He also sees that God reveals Himself visually in the tangible form of Spirit.

"A devotee accepts the maya of knowledge and makes it his shelter. He takes refuge in the company of the holy, in pilgrimage, in knowledge, and in non-attachment – all of them. He says, 'If "I" doesn't leave easily, let the rascal remain a servant or a devotee.'

"A devotee also attains knowledge of the Oneness of God. He sees that there is nothing but God. He doesn't call the world a dream, but he says that it is God who has become everything. In a garden of wax, it is all wax – only in different forms.

"But you attain this experience only when your love for God has matured. When too much bile accumulates, you get jaundice and everything looks

yellow. Srimati,[1] by constantly thinking about Shyam,[2] saw everything filled with Shyam; and even felt herself to be Shyam. If lead remains immersed in a basin of mercury, it becomes mercury. Thinking a long time about a beetle, a cockroach becomes motionless. It doesn't move and finally it turns into a beetle. A devotee also becomes ego-less constantly thinking about God. And then sees that 'He is I' and 'I' am, indeed, He.' When the cockroach becomes a beetle, everything is accomplished. Then comes liberation."

Girish and different moods of worship – 'I have the mood of a child with its mother'

"As long as this 'I' remains, a person should call on Him with one of these attitudes: serenity, servant, child[3] and so on.

"I had the attitude of a maid-servant for a whole year – the servant of the Divine Mother. I dressed and adorned myself as a woman in many ways. And I wore a nose ring. If you assume the attitude of a woman, you can conquer lust.

"You should worship the Primal Power.[4] You have to please Her. It is She who lives in the world in the form of all women. That's why I look on all women as mother.

"The attitude of looking on women as mother is very pure. The Tantra mentions worship in the company of a woman, *vamachara*. But that's not

1. Radha.
2. Krishna.
3. Shanta, dasya, vatsalya.
4. Adyashakti.

good. There's danger of slipping if you keep an object of enjoyment near you.

"Looking at a woman as mother is like the *ekadashi* fast without taking a drop of water. There's not a single trace of desire in it. But then there's also the *ekadashi* fast with a meal of fruit and roots. And then there's also *ekadashi* when you eat luchis and vegetable curry. I keep the *ekadashi* without taking a drop of water. I performed the Shorashi Puja[1] with the attitude of a woman as mother. I saw her breasts and female private parts as parts of Mother.

"The attitude of God as Mother is the last word in spiritual practice. 'You are the Mother and I am Your son' – this is the last word."

Difficult rules for a monk – rules for householders and Girish

"A sannyasin keeps the *ekadashi* fast without taking a drop of water. It is a dangerous situation if he clings to enjoyment. 'Lust and greed' are sense enjoyments – they're like swallowing your own spittle. Money, name and fame, sense pleasures – all these are sense enjoyments. It's not good for a sannyasin to even sit and talk to a woman devotee. It harms not only him, but others – they don't learn from it. It doesn't help them. A sannyasin lives to teach others.

"Sitting or talking with women for a long time is also described as a kind of sexual intercourse.

1. Worship of a sixteen-year old girl.

There are eight kinds of intercourse:[1] Listening to a woman and enjoying her conversation is one kind. Talking about women is another kind. To whisper to a woman in private is also a kind of intercourse. Another kind is to keep a memento of a woman and enjoy it. Touch is another kind. That's why you shouldn't touch the feet of your guru's wife if she's young. These are all rules of conduct for a sannyasin.

"It's different for householders. After begetting one or two children, a husband and wife should live as brother and sister. The other seven forms of intercourse are not so harmful for them.

"A householder has debts: debts to gods, to the father, to the rishis, to raise one or two children, and then debts to his wife – if she is chaste.

"Worldly people don't understand who a good wife is, and who is a bad one; who is the power of knowledge, *vidyashakti* and who exhibits the power of ignorance, *avidyashakti*. A good wife who is the power of knowledge has very little lust, anger and so on. Her sleep is short, she pushes her husband's head away. She has affection, compassion, devotion to God, modesty, and so on. She serves everybody like a mother. And she helps her husband to develop love for God. She doesn't spend much, so

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1. smaraṇaṁ kīrtanaṁ keliḥ prekṣaṇaṁ guhyabhāṣaṇam,
saṅkalpo'dhyavasāyaśca kriyāniṣpattireva ca.
etanmaithunamaṣṭāṅgam.
[Hearing about women, speaking about them, playing with women, watching them, speaking to them secretly, thinking of sexual intercourse, determination towards it and the actual accomplishment; these are the eights kinds of sexual intercourse.]

her husband doesn't have to work harder and deprive himself of thinking about God.

"And then, there are mannish women who have certain signs. Their bad traits are – squint eyes, pigeon breasts, cat eyes, and calf cheeks."

Essence of samadhi and Girish – ways to God-realization – Girish poses a question

Girish: "What is the way for us?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Bhakti, love for God, is the essence. But then there is the sattva of bhakti, rajas of bhakti and tamas of bhakti.

"Sattvic bhakti means an attitude of humility and modesty, while tamasic bhakti shows itself in the attitude of a highway robber: 'I have recited His name, how can I sin? You are my real Mother, You will have to reveal Yourself to me.'"

Girish (*smiling*): "You yourself are teaching us tamasic bhakti."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "But there are signs when one has attained His vision. The devotee goes into samadhi – there are five kinds or five different feelings. One is like the movement of an ant – the spiritual current[1] feels like it is crawling up like an ant. The second is like the movement of a fish. The third feels like the zig-zagging of a snake, the fourth like the flight of a bird – flying from one branch to another. The fifth is like the movement of a monkey, as if the great current jumps up to the head. Samadhi follows.

1. *Mahavayu*.

"And there are two other kinds of samadhi. Unwavering samadhi[1] when the person is completely unconsciousness of the outside world. It can last a long time, perhaps many days. In the other samadhi,[2] the scattered mind suddenly withdraws and unites with God."

Sudden samadhi and M.

(*To M.*) "Do you understand this?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "People have realized God many different ways. Some attain Him by long and hard spiritual practices – they become perfect through them.[3] Some are perfect from birth – for example, Narada, Sukadeva and others. They are known as ever-perfect.[4] And then there are those who realize Him suddenly,[5] – not expecting it, like Nanda Basu's inheriting great wealth."

Chapter II

Girish's peaceful attitude – devotion and liberation of the shudra in the Kaliyuga

Sri Ramakrishna: "And then there are ones who attain perfection in dreams[6] and those who attain it by God's grace.[7]"

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1. Sthita.
2. Unmana.
3. Sadhana-siddha.
4. Nitya-siddha.
5. Hatha-siddha.
6. Swapna siddha.
7. Kripa siddha.

Saying this, Thakur begins to sing, absorbed with feeling:

Does everyone attain the treasure of Shyama? Does everyone get the treasure of Kali?

The ignorant mind does not know what She is.

Even Shiva with all his austerities cannot fix his mind on Her crimson feet.

The riches and wealth of Indra and the other gods is a trifle compared to Her love.

If Mother Shyama turns toward one and casts Her glance, that one lives in eternal Bliss.

The kings of yogis, the best of munis, and Indra are unable to meditate on Her feet.

But the worthless Kamalakanta still yearns for those feet.

Thakur remains in ecstasy for some time. Girish and other devotees are seated in front of him. A few days ago Girish had said quite a few rude things at the Star Theatre, but he is in a quiet mood now.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "This mood of yours is very good – the peaceful mood. That's why I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, make him peaceful so he doesn't say rude things to me.'"

Girish (*to M.*): "It seems like somebody is pressing my tongue and not letting me speak."

Sri Ramakrishna is still in ecstasy and he gradually becomes forgetful of people and things outside. Then coming down somewhat to the normal state, he brings his mind down. He looks again at the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (*looking at M.*): "All these people come (to Dakshineswar). Let them. The Divine Mother knows everything.

(*To a young man of the neighbourhood*) "Hello! What do you think? What's man's duty?"

Everyone remains silent. Is Thakur saying that the aim of human life is God-realization?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narayan*): "Don't you want to pass your examinations? O, Shiva is freed from all bonds. A man is Shiva, but the individual soul is bound by them."[1]

Thakur is now in an ecstatic mood. Finding a glass of water near him, he drinks from it. He says to himself, "Why, I have drunk water in this mood."

Sri Ramakrishna and Atul – yearning for God

It is not yet dusk. Thakur is talking with Atul, Girish's brother. Atul is sitting in front of him with the other devotees. A brahmin neighbour is also sitting there. Atul is an advocate of the High Court.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Atul*): "I have this to tell you – do both. Live in the world and also try to develop love for God."

Brahmin neighbour: "Can a person attain perfection without being a brahmin?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why not? Devotion of shudras in the Kaliyuga has been mentioned. For example, Shavari, Ruhidas, Guhak Pariah – all these."

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1. *Pash-mukta* Shiva, *pash-baddha* jiva. Thakur is making a pun on the word *pash* (pass).

Narayan (*smiling*): "Brahmins and shudras, all one!"

Brahmin neighbor: "Is it possible to find God in one lifetime?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What is not possible when God's grace dawns? If you bring a light into a room that's been dark for a thousand years, does the darkness disappear little by little? No, the room is lit up all at once.

(*To Atul*) "Intense renunciation is necessary. It has to be like a naked sword removed from its sheath. When such dispassion arises in the mind, near and dear relatives appear like deadly snakes, and the home like a deep well. And you have to call on God earnestly, with a yearning heart. He is bound to listen to an earnest call."

Everybody is silent, reflecting on what Thakur has said.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Atul*): "But maybe you don't have such yearning, such a pull."

Atul: "The mind doesn't concentrate."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The yoga of practice.[1] You have to call on Him daily. It doesn't happen in one day. Yearning comes when you call on Him daily.

"How can yearning come when a person is involved in worldly things day and night? In the beginning Jadu Mallick used to listen to spiritual talk, and he also used to talk about God. These days he doesn't talk so much. Day and night he is

1. Abhyasa Yoga.

surrounded by flatterers and only talks about worldly things."

Prayer at dusk – Tejchandra

It is now dusk. A lamp is lighted in the room. Sri Ramakrishna chants the name of God. He sings and prays.

He chants, "Haribol, Haribol, Haribol" and then, "Rama, Rama, Rama," then, 'Nitya Lilamayi,'[1] 'O Mother, tell us the way, Mother. You are our only refuge, our only refuge, our only refuge are You.'

Noticing that Girish is restless, Thakur stops talking for awhile. He says to Tejchandra, "Come and sit closer to me."

Tejchandra comes and sits near him. After awhile, he whispers to M., "I have to leave."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "What is he saying?"

M.: "He has to go home."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why do I attract these boys so much? Because they are pure receptacles – worldliness hasn't touched them yet. If there is worldliness in a person, he can't grasp spiritual instruction. You can keep milk safely in a new pot, but if you put it in a pot already used for making curds, it turns sour. A cup that garlic paste has been made in doesn't lose its smell even if you wash it a thousand times."

1. The Mother image of eternal sport.

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna, Star Theatre – Thakur watches the play of *Vrishaketu* with Narendra and others

Sri Ramakrishna is going to watch the performance of *Vrishaketu*. The Star Theatre is the same theatre on Beadon Street where the Manomohan Theatre later came into existence. Arriving there, they sit in a box facing south. M. and other devotees sit near Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Has Narendra come?"

M.: "Yes, sir."

The play begins. Karana and his wife, Padmavati, sacrifice their son, Vrishaketu [to please God, their guest, who came in the guise of a Brahmin to test Karana's charity]. Each one holds one end of a saw. Padmavati cries while she cooks the meat. The old brahmin guest says happily to Karana, "Come now, let's sit down together and share the meat." Karana says, "I can't do that. I can't eat the flesh of my son."

A devotee breathes heavily in consolation. Thakur also expresses his sorrow.

The play over, the Master goes to the recreation room. Girish, Narendra and other devotees are already there. When he enters the room, Sri Ramakrishna stands near Narendra and says, "I have come."

Overwhelmed hearing the sound of the sanai

Thakur sits down. The music is still heard.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "I feel happy listening to this music. There (in Dakshineswar), I used to be filled with ecstasy when they played the sanai. Noticing my state of mind, a sadhu said, 'This is a sign of the knowledge of Brahman.'"

Girish and 'me-mine'

When the music stops, Sri Ramakrishna speaks again.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Girish*): "Is it your theatre or does it belong to other people too?"

Girish: "Ours, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It's good to say 'ours'. It's not good to say 'mine'. Some people [talk of *me* and *mine]* say, 'I have come here on my own.' Only egotistical people of poor understanding say such a thing."

Sri Ramakrishna with Narendra and others

Narendra: "The world is theatre."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, yes. Quite right. But at some place it's the play of vidya,[1] other places the play of avidya.[2]"

Narendra: "Everything is the play of vidya."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, yes. But that only comes with the knowledge of Brahman. In the case of a

1. Knowledge.
2. Ignorance.

devotee following the path of devotion, there's both: vidyamaya and avidyamaya.

"Sing a little."

Narendra sings:

The waves of ecstatic love for God rise on the sea of the bliss of consciousness.

The sweet play of intense bliss[1] has overwhelmed me.

All has become one in the great union.[2]

All divide and distinctions of time and space have disappeared.

Now, raising your arms in the inebriation of bliss, with the mind sing Hari's name.

When Narendra sings, "All has become one in the great union," Sri Ramakrishna says, "This is what a person realizes when he has attained the knowledge of Brahman – as you were saying, indeed everything is vidya."

When Narendra sings, "Now raising your arms in the inebriation of bliss, with the mind sing Hari's name," Sri Ramakrishna says, "Repeat that again."

When the song ends, Sri Ramakrishna resumes his conversation with the devotees.

Girish: "Devendra Babu didn't come. He said peevishly, 'We don't have fillings of condensed milk, we're only filled with lentil paste.[3] What can we contribute if we go there?"

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1. Mahabhava.
2. Mahayoga.
3. Meaning: without milk, the sweetness of divine love, we will only be filled with worthless lentil soup.

Sri Ramakrishna (*surprised*): "What? He never spoke like that before!"

Thakur has refreshments. He offers some to Narendra.

Jatin Deva (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "You're always saying, 'Eat, Narendra; do eat, Narendra.' Have the rest of us washed in with the wave?"

> Thakur is very fond of Jatin, who comes to Dakshineswar to visit him from time to time. Sometimes he stays for the night. He is a son of an aristocratic family of Sobhabazar – he belongs to the house of Radhakanta Deva.[1]

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Narendra, smiling*): "He's (Jatin) talking about you."

Then Thakur laughs and touches Jatin affectionately by holding his chin. He says "Go there and eat" [in other words, go to Dakshineswar].

Thakur is now going to watch the play *Vivaha Vibhrant*.[2] He goes to the box and takes his seat. He laughs when he hears the conversation of the maidservant in the play.

Girish's belief in incarnations of God – Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation?

After watching the action on the stage for awhile, Thakur becomes absent-minded. He whispers to M.

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1. Radhakanta was the family's household deity.
2. A marriage farce.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Well, is it true, what Girish Ghosh says (that he is an incarnation of God) true?"

M. "He's right. If it weren't true, why would it appeal to us?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Look, I'm going through a change. My old mood has changed. I can't touch anything metal anymore."

M. listens, speechless.

Sri Ramakrishna: "This is a new state. It has a deep meaning."

Thakur cannot touch metal. Incarnations of God do not enjoy any of the splendours of maya. Is this why Thakur is saying this?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Do you see any change in me?"

M.: "How, sir?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "In what I do."

M.: "Your activities are increasing as more people have come to know about you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You see! What I said before is becoming true now."

Thakur is silent for awhile. Then suddenly he says, "Well, why can't Paltu meditate well?"

Girish's cup of garlic – the Lord's message of hope for so-called sinners

Now Thakur is ready to go back to Dakshineswar.

Talking about Girish, Thakur had said to a devotee, "Does the cup in which garlic paste is made lose its smell completely if you wash it a thousand times?" Girish's pride had been wounded.

When Thakur is ready to go, Girish speaks to him.

Girish (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Will the smell of garlic ever go?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, it will go."

Girish: "So you are saying that it will?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "All smell or odor leaves when you put it in fire for a long time. If you put a cup smelling of garlic through fire, it won't retain its smell. It becomes a fresh, new cup.

"The person who says he won't succeed doesn't succeed. A person who feels he is liberated becomes liberated. But the person who thinks himself bound remains bound. The one who says emphatically that he is liberated does in fact become liberated. The one who says day and night, 'I am bound, I am bound' truly is bound."

Section XVIII

Sri Ramakrishna Observing Silence and Vision of Maya

Chapter I

Sri Ramakrishna has been observing silence from eight in the morning to three in the afternoon. Today is Tuesday, 11 August 1885, 27th day of Shravana. The new moon day[1] was yesterday.

Sri Ramakrishna's disease has manifested. Has he come to know that he will soon be quitting this world to sit again in the lap of the Divine Mother? Is it because of this that he is observing silence? The Holy Mother weeps to see that he doesn't speak. Rakhal and Latu also weep. The brahmini woman of Baghbazar has arrived and is also crying.

The devotees ask him every now and then, "Will you remain silent always?"

Sri Ramakrishna by a sign says, "No."

Narayan comes at three o'clock. Thakur says to him, "Mother will bless you."

Narayan happily gives the news, "Thakur is speaking now." It is as if a heavy stone has been removed from the chest of Rakhal and the other devotees. They all come and sit near Thakur.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Rakhal and the other devotees*): "The Divine Mother has shown me that everything is maya. Only She is real and everything else is the manifestation of Her maya.

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1. Amavasya.

"And She showed me something else: how much every devotee has progressed."

Narayan and other devotees: "Well, how far has each of us advanced?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "I saw everything about them: Nityagopal, Rakhal, Narayan, Purna, Mahima Chakravarti and others."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna with Girish, Pundit Shashadhar and other devotees

The devotees in Calcutta have come to know of Thakur's illness. They understand that his epiglottis is diseased.

Today is Sunday, 16 August 1885; the first of Bhadrapada. A number of devotees have come to visit him – Girish, Ram, Nityagopal, Mahima Chakravarti, Kishori (Gupta), Pundit Shashadhar, Tarka Chudamani.

Thakur is full of joy as usual and talks to the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I can't talk about my disease with the Divine Mother. I feel ashamed to mention it."

Girish: "My Narayana will heal you."

Ram: "You'll be all right."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Yes, please bless me like that." (*All laugh.*)

Girish has started coming just recently. Thakur says to him, "You have to live in the middle of a lot

of problems. You have so many things to do. Come here three times more." Now he talks to Shashadhar.

Advice to Pundit Shashadhar – Brahman and the Primal Power are the same

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Shashadhar*): "Say something about the Primal Power."

Shashadhar: "What do I know?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "A person was very respectful of another. The latter asked him to bring some fire to light a smoke for him. He said, 'Am I fit to bring fire for you?' And he didn't bring it!" (*All laugh.*)

Shashadhar: "Sir, the Divine Mother Herself is the cause and the material of the universe. It is She who creates it and its creatures. Then She Herself dwells as the universe and as its creatures. Just like a spider that makes a web (instrumental cause), drawing the web out of itself (material cause)."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And this is also true. He who is Purusha is also Prakriti; He who is the Absolute is also the Primal Power. When He is not active, when He is not creating, preserving or dissolving, I call Him Brahman or Purusha. And when He is active doing all these things, I call Him Shakti, Prakriti. But He who is Brahman is also the Primal Power. He who is Purusha has become Prakriti. Water is water whether it is still or moving. A snake remains a snake whether it moves in its zigzag way or lies coiled up quietly.

Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi talking about the knowledge of Brahman – desire for sense enjoyment and duty

"What Brahman is cannot be expressed in words. Speech stops. At the end of the song, 'Nitai is my mad elephant!' nothing remains to be said. First the singer repeats, 'Elephant, elephant.' Then, after saying 'Elephant,' he now can only say, 'Ele.' In the end, he can't even utter this. He loses all outer consciousness.

Saying this, Thakur goes into samadhi. He is standing.

Coming out of samadhi, he says, "What is beyond 'kshara'[1] and 'akshara'[2] cannot be described in words."

Everyone is silent. Thakur continues: "As long as the desire for sense enjoyment is not fulfilled and duties remain unfinished, a person cannot attain samadhi.[3]

(*To Shashadhar*) "God is making you work now, giving lectures and so on. You have to do all that now. "When this work is finished, there will be no more duties. A housewife who has finished the chores of the household and goes for a bath does not return however much you call her."

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1. Perishable.
2. Indestructible.
3. bhogaiśvaryaprasaktānāṁ tayāpahṛtacetasām,
vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ samādhau na vidhīyate ।
gītā 2-44
[O Partha, no set determination is formed in the minds of those that are deeply attached to pleasure and power, and whose discrimination is stole.]

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna ill – Doctor Rakhal – dancing with the devotees

Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in his room at Dakshineswar with the devotees. Today is Sunday, 20 September 1885, 5th of Aswin, the 11th day of the bright fortnight. Navagopal, Haralal (a teacher in the Hindu School), Rakhal, Latu, the kirtan singer Goswami and several others are present.

M. has brought Doctor Rakhal from Bowbazar to examine Thakur's sore throat. The doctor is stout and has thick fingers.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to the doctor*): "Wrestlers have fingers like yours. When Mahendra Sarkar examined my throat, he pressed my tongue so hard I felt great pain. He did it like he was pressing a cow's tongue."

Doctor Rakhal: "Let me examine you. You won't feel any pain."

Why is Sri Ramakrishna suffering?

After the Doctor examined him and made a prescription, Sri Ramakrishna begins to talk.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Well, people say that if he's so holy, why is he suffering from disease?"

Tarak: "Bhagavan Das Babaji was confined to bed for a long time because of illness."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Doctor Madhu carries food to the house of his mistress. He's sixty years old, but he's not suffering from any disease."

Goswami: "Your disease, sir, is because of others. You take upon yourself the transgressions of those who visit you. That's why you're suffering."

A Devotee: "If you say to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, cure me of this disease,' you will be cured quickly.'"

Attitude of master and servant is diminishing – even looking for 'I-ness,' it can't be traced

Sri Ramakrishna: "I can't ask the Divine Mother to cure me. And the attitude of master and servant is diminishing. Sometimes I say, 'Mother, please repair the scabbard of the sword a little.' But I can make such a prayer less and less now. These days even when I'm looking for 'I,' it can't be found. I see that She Herself is dwelling inside this scabbard."

The Goswami has come for kirtan. A devotee asks whether there will be music. Sri Ramakrishna is not well and might become ecstatic if there is kirtan – this is what everyone is afraid of.

Sri Ramakrishna says, "Let's have a little kirtan. They're afraid I might go into ecstasy – it hurts that spot in my throat."

Listening to the music, Thakur is unable to control his feelings. He stands up and begins to dance with the devotees.

Doctor Rakhal sees everything. His hired carriage is waiting for him. He and M. stand up to return to Calcutta. Both of them salute Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna (*affectionately, to M.*): "Have you had your meal?"

Instructions to M. on self-realization – 'the body is only a sheath'

It is Thursday, 24 September, the full moon day. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting on the smaller cot in his room. He is in agony with the disease in his throat. M. and the other devotees are sitting on the floor.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to M.*): "Every now and then I think this body is only a pillowcase. There's nothing but the Indivisible (Sat-chit-ananda).

"When I go into ecstasy, the disease stays away from me. Now that mood is coming on me and I feel like laughing."

Dwija's sister and younger maternal grandmother have come to see Thakur since hearing of his illness. After saluting him, they sit on one side of the room. Seeing the maternal grandmother, Thakur asks, "Who is she? Is she the one who raised Dwija? Why has Dwija brought an ektara?"[1]

M.: "Sir, it has two strings."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Dwija's father doesn't agree with his views. Besides, what will people say? It's better for him to pray secretly."

There is an extra picture of Gaur and Nitai on the wall of Sri Ramakrishna's room. The picture is of Gaur and Nitai singing kirtan in Navadvip with their companions.

Ramlal (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Let me give this picture (to M.)."

1. A single-stringed musical instrument.

Sri Ramakrishna: "That would be good."

Sri Ramakrishna and Harish's service

Thakur has been taking the medicine prescribed by Doctor Pratap for some time. He woke up deep at night feeling very restless. Harish, who was in the room, was nursing him. Rakhal was also there. Ramlal is sleeping on the verandah outside. Later, Thakur said, "When I was feeling so restless, I felt like embracing Harish. After being massaged with medicinal oil, I felt better and began to dance."

Appendix I

Sri Ramakrishna and Narendra (Swami Vivekananda)

Vivekananda in America and in Europe

Chapter I

It is the day following the Rathayatra, 1885, Sankranti of the month of Ashada. This morning Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna is sitting with the devotees in Balaram's house talking about Narendra's (Swami Vivekananda's) great qualities.

Great qualities of Narendra – 'a prince among men'

"Narendra belongs to a very high plane – the realm of the Absolute. He has a manly nature. Many devotees come here, but none can equal him.

"Now and then I sit down and consider the devotees. They are like lotuses: some with ten petals, others with sixteen petals and some others with a hundred petals. But among lotuses Narendra is a thousand-petalled lotus.

"The others may be a brass pot or a jug – but Narendra is a barrel.

"Compared to ponds and tanks, Narendra is a big lake like the Haldarpukur.

"Among fish, he is a big red-eyed carp. Others are different kinds of small fish – minnows and other small fish.[1]

"He is a very large container – he can hold many things. He is a bamboo with a big space inside.

"Narendra is not under the control of anything. He is above attachment and sense enjoyments. He is a male pigeon. If you hold a male pigeon's beak, it will pull it back – a female pigeon doesn't resist."

First realize God – when you receive the commandment you may preach

Three years ago, in 1882, Narendra came to visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar with a couple of Brahmo friends. He stayed there for the night. At dawn, Thakur said, "Go and meditate in the Panchavati." A short time later, Thakur went there and saw that Narendra was meditating with his friends at the foot of the Panchavati. When the meditation was over, Thakur said to him, "Look, the aim of life is to realize God. You should meditate and think on Him privately in a solitary spot and with a yearning heart. And you should pray and weep, saying, 'Lord, reveal Thyself to me!'"

About the welfare work of the Brahmo Samaj and other religious sects – like the education of women, establishing schools and lecturing – he said, "First realize God, both the formless God and God with form. He who is beyond speech and mind assumes a form for the sake of devotees – appears

1. Pona, kathi vatta.

and talks to them. After attaining His vision and getting His commandment, then one should take to humanitarian work. It is said in a song: No deity has been installed in the temple, yet Podo blows a conchshell as if arati is being performed. So somebody scolds him, saying:

O Podo, Madhava has not been installed in your temple.

You have unnecessarily created confusion by blowing the conch.

Eleven bats live here day and night.

"If you wish to install Madhava in the temple of your heart, if you wish to realize God, what is the use of only blowing the conch shell? Purify your heart first. When the heart is purified, the Lord will come and sit upon the pure seat. When there are bat droppings, Madhava cannot be brought here. The eleven bats are the eleven sense organs.

"First dive deep. Dive and pick up the jewels. Other work will come later. First install Madhava. Then if you feel like it, you can deliver lectures.

"Nobody likes to dive. No one practices spiritual disciplines – devotion is missing, discrimination and non-attachment are absent. After learning a few words, people start lecturing.

"It's difficult to teach people. If someone receives His command after realizing God, only then can he instruct."

Pundit Shashadhar met Sri Ramakrishna in Calcutta on the Rathayatra day in 1884. Narendra was there. Sri Ramakrishna said to the pundit, "You lecture for the benefit of people. That is good. But my dear, without receiving a command from

God, instructions are useless. People will listen to your lectures for two days and then forget about them. There were people who used to ease themselves on the bank of Haldarpukur. Others berated them with foul language, but they continued. At last, when the government put up a notice, it stopped. In the same way teaching is useless if you haven't received a command from God."

That's why, taking the instruction of his guru, Narendra renounced the world and carried out austerities secretly in solitude. Later, after strengthening himself, he took up the difficult task of teaching humanity.

When Sri Ramakrishna was lying ill at Cossipore in 1886, he wrote on a piece of paper: "Naren will instruct mankind."

Swami Vivekananda sent a letter to the residents of Madras from America. In it he said he was a servant of Sri Ramakrishna and was becoming his messenger; he was propagating Thakur's message to the whole world:

> "It was your generous appreciation of him whose message to India and to the whole world, I, the most unworthy of His servants, had the privilege to bear, it was your innate spiritual instinct which saw in him and his message the first murmurs of that tidal wave of spirituality which is destined at no distant future to break upon India in all its irresistible power"... (Reply to the Madras Address)

In his third lecture in Madras, he said, "Whatever of significance I have said is all the

Paramahamsa's. And if I have told you anything with no substance, it is all mine."

> "Let me conclude by saying that if in my life I have told one word of truth, it was his and his alone; and if I have told you many things which were not true, correct and beneficial to the human race, it was all mine and on me is the responsibility." (Third lecture, Madras.)

When he was welcomed in Radhakanta's house in Calcutta, he said that the power of Sri Ramakrishna was manifest around the world. O Indians, meditate on Him and you will achieve greatness in every type of activity. He said:

> "If this nation wants to rise, it will have to rally enthusiastically round his name. It does not matter who preaches Ramakrishna Paramahamsa; whether I or you or anybody else. But him I place before you and it is for you to judge, and for the good of our race, for the good of our nation, to judge now what you shall do with His great ideal of life.
>
> Within ten years of his passing away His Power had encircled the globe. Judge him not through me. I am only a weak instrument. His character was so great that I or any of his disciples, if we spent hundreds of lives, could do no justice to a millionth part of what he really was!"

While talking about his gurudeva, Swami Vivekananda would be completely beside himself. Blessed be his love and devotion to his guru!

Chapter II

The work of spreading Sri Ramakrishna's teachings by Narendra

Today we will comment a little on how Swami Vivekananda made efforts to spread the universal eternal Hindu religion[1] as taught by Sri Paramahamsa Deva.

Realization of God

Sri Ramakrishna's first teaching was that you have to realize God. Religion does not mean memorizing the doctrines of a religion or quoting verses. God-realization comes to the devotee who calls on Him with a yearning heart – whether in this life or another. I remember what he said one day at the Kali temple in Dakshineswar.

The Paramahamsa was talking to Mahima Chakravarti of Cossipore (on Sunday, 26 October 1884).

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Mahimacharan and other devotees*): "How long will you study scriptures? What is the use of only reasoning? First you have to try to realize Him. What will you know by reading books? As long as you are at a distance from the marketplace, you only hear the hustle and bustle. When you reach it, you find it very different. Then you see and hear clearly: 'Take these potatoes, pay me for them.'

"You don't get the right feeling from books. There is a great difference. When you realize God,

1. Sanatana Dharma.

scriptures and science all seem like straw and dry grass.

"What you need is to know the rich man. Why are you anxious to know how many houses, gardens, and company shares he has? Somehow or other get introduced to the owner – whether or not you have to scale the fence to do so. Then if he wishes he will tell you himself about his houses, gardens and company shares. Once you're introduced to the proprietor, his servants and his guards will all salute you." (*All laugh.*)

Devotee: "But then how can you manage to get acquainted with the proprietor?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You have to work for it – practice spiritual disciplines. It won't do to just sit and say that God exists. You have to reach Him somehow. Call on Him in solitude and pray, 'Reveal Yourself to me!' Weep with a longing heart. You roam around madly for 'lust and greed' – be a little mad for Him too. Let people say that so-and-so is mad for God. In whatever way you can, call on Him in solitude for a few days – renounce all else. What is the use of just sitting there and saying, 'He exists?' There are big fish in the Haldarpukur. Can you get one by just sitting on its bank? Prepare some bait and offer it to the fish. Gradually, one will come out of the deep water, making ripples on the surface. Then you will feel joy. You might be able to have a little glimpse of it jumping out of the water. When you see it, you feel even more joy."[1]

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1. Jesus Christ would tell his devotees: 'Blessed are the pure in spirit, for they shall see God.'

Swamiji said exactly the same thing at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, i.e. the aim of religion is God-realization, to see God:

> "The Hindu does not want to live upon words and theories. He must see God and that alone can destroy all doubts. So the best proof a Hindu sage gives about the soul, about God, is I have seen the soul; I have seen God … the whole struggle in their system is a constant struggle to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God and see God; and their reaching God, seeing God, becoming perfect even 'as the Father in Heaven is perfect', constitutes the religion of the Hindus." Lectures on Hinduism (Parliament of Religions, Chicago)

Swamiji lectured at many places in America and he said the same thing everywhere. In a place known as Hartford, he said:

> "The next idea that I want to bring to you is that religion does not consist in doctrines or dogmas… The end of all religions is the realization of God in the soul. Ideals and methods may differ but that is the central point. That is the realization of God, something behind this world of sense – this world of eternal eating and drinking and talking non-sense – this world of eternal shadows and selfishness. There is that beyond all books, beyond all creeds, beyond the varieties of this world and that is the realization of God within you. A man may believe in all the churches in the world, he may carry on his head all the sacred books ever written, he may baptize himself in all the rivers of the earth; still if he has no perception of God I would class him with the rankest atheist."

Swamiji said in his book *Raja Yoga* that people nowadays do not believe that God can be realized. They say, 'Yes, rishis and great spiritual

personalities like Christ may have realized the Self. But that doesn't happen these days.' Swamiji says that one certainly can realize the Self. Practice concentration of mind; you will certainly find Him within your heart:

> "The teachers all saw God; they all saw their own souls and what they saw they preached. Only there is this difference that by most of these religions, especially in modern times, a peculiar claim is made, namely, that these experiences are impossible at the present day; they were only possible with a few men, who were the first founders of the religion and subsequently bore their names. At the present time these experiences have become obsolete and therefore we have now to take religion on belief, this I entirely deny. Uniformity is the rigorous law of nature; what once happened can happen always." (Raja-yoga: Introduction)

On 9 January, 1896 Swamiji lectured in New York on the Ideal of Universal Religion. That is to say, the religion where you can find the followers of the path of knowledge or devotion or action unite. While ending his lecture he said: The aim of all religions is God-realization. He also said: knowledge, action, devotion – these are all different paths, different ways – but the goal is the same, the realization of God. He said:

> "Then again all these various yogas (work or worship, psychic control or philosophy) have to be carried out into practice; theories will not do. We have to meditate upon it, realise it until it becomes our whole life. Religion is realization, not talk nor doctrine nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging. It is not an intellectual assent. By intellectual assent we can come to a hundred sorts of foolish things and change

> them next day, but this being and becoming is what Religion is."

In a letter he wrote to the residents of Madras he said: The specialty of the Hindu religion is realizing God. The chief ideal of the Vedas is realization of God. This is what distinguishes the Hindu religion from others:

> "The one idea which distinguishes the Hindu religion from every other in the world, the one idea to express that which the sages almost exhaust the vocabulary of the Sanskrit language, is that man must realize God… Thus to realize God, Brahman, as the Dvaitins (dualists) say, or to become Brahman as the Advaitins say – is the aim and end of the whole teachings of the Vedas."

Swamiji lectured in London on 29 October 1896. His subject was God-realization. In this lecture he read from the Kathopanishad and mentioned the story of Nachiketa. Nachiketa wanted to see God. He wanted to acquire the knowledge of Brahman. Yama, the King of Death,[1] said, "Brother, if you want to know God, you will have to rid yourself of attachment and the desire for enjoyment. You cannot attain union with God if there is desire for enjoyment. By loving something insubstantial [avastu], you cannot attain the substantial [vastu]." Swamiji said, "According to me, everybody is an atheist. With the help of a rigmarole of words, I harp on religion. If you see God only once, you will gain real faith.

"We are all atheist and yet we try to fight the man who tries to confess it. We are all in the dark;

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1. Dharmaraj.

religion is to us mere intellectual talk. We consider a man religious who can talk well. But this not religion… Religion comes when that actual realization in our own souls begins. That will be the dawn of religion. Then will real faith begin."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and Narendra. Harmony of religions

Narendra and other educated young men were surprised to see Sri Ramakrishna's love and reverence for all religions. The paramahamsa would frankly say that there is truth in all religions. And he would add: All religions are true – you can reach God through every religion. One day, the Kojagar Lakshmi Puja day[1] (27 October 1882), Keshab Sen went by steamer to see Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar and took Thakur back to Calcutta. They talked about many things on the way – the same conversation as the one on 13 August, a few months ago. I am quoting from my diary their talk about the harmony of religions.

Kedarnath Chatterji organized a great festival at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. After the celebration, about three or four o'clock, many talked on the southern verandah.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "As many religions, so many paths. Every religion is true. It's like going to Kalighat by different paths. Religion is not God. One can reach God following different creeds.

"Rivers come from different directions – but they all end in the ocean. They all become one there.

1. Full moon day of the bright fortnight of Aswin, the nightlong puja of Lakshmi.

"You can climb to the roof by different means. You can go up by brick steps, a wooden ladder, a spiral staircase, even a rope. But you have to hold onto only one. You can't put your foot on two or three different kinds of steps and reach the roof. But when you have reached it, you can come down by using any means, and again go up.

"So at first a person must follow only one religion. When God is realized, he can come and go by any religious path. When he is among Hindus, everybody thinks he is a Hindu. When he is with Muslims, all think he is a Muslim. And when he is with Christians, they all think he is a Christian.

"The followers of all religions call upon the same one Person. Some call Him Ishvara, some Rama, some Hari and others Allah or Brahman. These are different names, but the Reality is the same.

"A pond has four landing steps. Hindus take water from one of them and call it *jal*; from another, Muslims take water and call it *pani*; Christians at yet another spot call it water; and then there are some people who call it *aqua*. (*All laugh.*) It's the same thing – water. But the names are different. What is the use in quarreling? Everybody is calling upon the one, the same, God, and everybody will go to Him."

A Devotee (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Is there anything false in another religion?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Which religion is without error? Everybody says his watch gives the correct time. But no watch is absolutely correct. All

watches have to be set right from time to time by comparing them with the sun.

"What religion has no error? But even if there is an error and you call on Him sincerely with a yearning heart, God will certainly listen to you.

"Just imagine a father with many sons, small and big. Not all of them can say, 'Father.'[1] One says, 'Baba', another says, 'Ba.' Yet another one says just, 'Pa.' Will the father be angry with the ones who can't pronounce *baba*? (*All laugh*.) No, the father will still love them all equally.[2]

"People think that their religion is true, that they have understood what God is, but these people have not understood. They think they are calling on Him correctly, but they're not. They think that God grants them His grace but not others. Such people don't understand that God is the father and mother of all. If they are sincere, He will be compassionate to all."

What the religion of love is, he explained many times. But how many people have been able to comprehend it? How much could even Keshab Sen understand? Swami Vivekananda, having been initiated into this fiery formula of love, was able to propagate it in the world. Sri Ramakrishna again and again advised not taking recourse to dogmatism. To say that my religion is true and yours is false is dogmatism. And it is the basis of all trouble. Swamiji spoke of this at the Parliament of

1. Baba.
2. The same is mentioned in an English book: Max Muller's Hibbert Lectures. Max Muller also explained it with the same metaphor, that it is not right to hate those who worship gods and goddesses.

Religions in Chicago: how much killing, shedding of blood, and violence have taken place in the name of Christianity, Islam and other religions:

> "Sectarianism, bigotry and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often, and often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair." Lecture on Hinduism, (Chicago, Parliament of Religions).

In another lecture Swamiji said, "All religions are true," and tried to explain it through scientific reasoning.

> "If anyone here hopes that this unity will come by the triumph of any one of these religions and destruction of the others, to him I say, Brother, yours is an impossible hope. Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid.
>
> "The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become earth or the air or the water? No, it becomes a plant, it assimilates the air, the earth and the water, converts them into plant substance and grows a plant.
>
> "Similar in the case with religion. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve its own individuality and grow according to its own law of growth."

In America Swamiji lectured on the Hindu religion at the Brooklyn Ethical Society. Dr. Lewis Janes chaired this meeting. Here too, Swamiji's first words were on the harmony of religions. He

said that it is not possible that the religion of a particular person is true and those of all others are false. To say that only my religion is true is a kind of disease. We all have five fingers. If one person has six, we will have to say that he is different."

> "Truth has always been universal. If I alone were to have six fingers on my hand while all of you have only five, you would not think that my hand was the true intent of nature, but rather that it was abnormal and diseased. Just so with religion. If one creed alone were to be true and all others untrue, you would have again to say that, that religion is diseased. If one religion is true, all others must be true. Thus the Hindu religion is your property as well as mine." (Lecture at Brooklyn Ethical Society)

When Swamiji spoke to thousands at his first lecture at the Chicago Parliament of Religions, six thousand were fascinated and stood up to give him a standing ovation.[1] He said:

> "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to tell you that I belong to a religion into whose sacred language, the Sanskrit, the word 'exclusion' is untranslatable."

1. "When Vivekananda addressed the audience as sisters and brothers of America, there arose a peal of applause that lasted for several minutes." (Dr. Barrow's Report) "But eloquent as were many of the brief speeches, no one expressed so well the spirit of the Parliament of Religions and its limitations as the Hindu monk… He is an orator by divine right." (New York Critique, 1893).

Chapter IV

Sri Ramakrishna, Narendra, Karma Yoga and Patriotism

Sri Ramakrishna used to always say, "'Me and mine,' this is just ignorance. 'You and yours,' is knowledge." One day, a great festival was being celebrated in the courtyard of Suresh Mitra, on Sunday, 15 June 1884. Sri Ramakrishna and many devotees, including many Brahmo devotees, were there. Thakur said to Pratap Chandra Majumdar and other devotees, "Look, 'me and mine' – this alone is ignorance. Everybody says that the Kali Temple was built by Rani Rasmani – nobody says that God built it. So-and-so founded the Brahmo Samaj – that's what people say. Nobody says that it came about by the will of God. 'I have done it' – this is ignorance. 'O God, nothing at all is mine, this Kali Temple is not mine, the Samaj is not mine, all these belong to you; wife, son and family, none of these are mine, they are all yours.' These are the words of spiritual wisdom."

"Saying, 'Mine! Mine,' and getting attached to all those things are maya. Loving everybody is compassion. I love only the members of the Brahmo Samaj is maya. To love all people of the country, the followers of all religions, comes from compassion, love of God. Maya binds a man and makes him forget God, but compassion moves him to realize God. Sukadeva and Narada had compassion."

Thakur said, "To love only your compatriots is maya. To love people of all countries and all religions comes from compassion, love of God." Then why did Swami Vivekananda concern himself so much with his own country?

Swamiji said one day at the Chicago Parliament of Religions that he went there to beg for money for his poor countrymen, but he found it very difficult. It is very difficult to collect money from Christians for people who are not Christian.

> "The crying evil in the East is not religion, they have religion enough, but it is bread that the suffering millions of burning India cry out for with parched throats;…
>
> "I came here to seek aid for my impoverished people and fully realized how difficult it was to get help for heathens from Christians in the Christian land." Speech before the Parliament of Religions (Chicago Tribune).

One of the chief disciples of Swamiji, Sister Nivedita (Miss Margaret Noble) said that when Swamiji was living in Chicago, he would shower a lot of love on any Indian he met, whatever religion he belonged to – Hindu, Parsee or Muslim. He would take his countrymen to the prosperous home where he was staying as a guest. The hosts took care of them generously. They knew very well that if they didn't, Swamiji would surely leave their homes and go somewhere else.

> "At Chicago any Indian man attending the great world Bazaar, rich or poor, high or low, Hindu, Mohammaden, Parsee, what not, might at any moment be brought by him to his hosts for hospitality

> and entertainment and they well knew that any failure of kindness on their part to the least of these would immediately have lost them his presence."

Swamiji constantly pondered how to rid his countrymen from the pangs of poverty, how to educate them correctly, how to help them grow spiritually. But he was as anxious for the African Negroes as he was for his own countrymen. Sister Nivedita said that when Swamiji was traveling in the southern United States, some refused to receive him, thinking that he was a coloured man, a negro. But when they found out that he was a Hindu monk, the well-known Swami Vivekananda, they took him home with great regard and served him. They said to him, "When we asked if you were an African, why did you leave without saying anything?"

Swamiji said, "But why? Isn't the African Negro my brother?"– in other words, "Are my countrymen different from men anywhere in the world?" You should love a negro the same way you love a countryman. But because one always lives with his own countrymen, service to them comes first. This is called service without attachment.

It is also called karma yoga. Everybody works, but work without expectation of any reward is very difficult. Without renouncing everything, without meditating on God in solitude for a long time, it's not possible to help one's country. Don't say, 'My country,' for that is maya. Whoever lives there are Yours (God's), so want to serve them. It is Your command, that's the reason to serve one's country. 'It is Your work,' I am your servant – that's why I

observe this vow. Whether I succeed or not. You [God] care about it – it is not for my own name or fame, it is to bring to light Your glory."

What is real patriotism? It was to teach its ideal to humanity that Swamiji took this earnest vow. Those who have a home and family, those who have never longed for God, who, hearing the word *renunciation* only smile, those whose minds are always on 'lust and greed' and for name and fame in this world, those who are struck dumb to hear that the ideal of human life is to realize God – how can such people accept this high and lofty ideal of benefiting their country? Though Swamiji used to weep for his, he always remembered with it that in this transitory world only God is real and everything else is unreal. When he returned from the foreign land, Swamiji went to Almora to see the Himalayas. The residents of Almora worshipped him as the very presence of God. When he saw the very high peaks of Nagadhiraj Deva Atma Himgiri, he became absorbed with emotion. He said, "Today I am seeing that holy land of renunciation in the holy Uttarakhand, where rishis meditated on God day and night after renouncing the hubbub of the world. It was from their lips that the Vedic verses poured. Oh, when will such a day come to me? I do have the desire to continue some work, but coming to this holy land again after so long, I am losing those desires. Now I wish to sit down alone and spend my last days in meditation on the lotus feet of Hari, merged in deep samadhi.

> "It is the hope of my life to end my days somewhere within this Father of Mountains, where Rishis lived – where philosophy was born." (Speech at Almora.)

On seeing the Himalayas, one's desire for work is lost. Only one idea comes to mind, the renunciation of work.[1]

> "As peak after peak of this Father of Mountains began to appear before my sight, all those propensities to work, that ferment that had been going on in my brain for years seemed to quiet down and mind reverted to that one eternal theme which the Himalayas always teach us, that one theme which is reverberating in the very atmosphere of the place, the one theme, the murmur, of which I hear even now in the rushing whirlpools of its rivers – renunciation."[2]

Upon achieving this renunciation, this detachment, a person becomes fearless – all other things involve fear.

> sarvaṁ vastu bhayānvitaṁ bhuvi nṛṇāṁ vairāgyamevābhayam
>
> vairāgyaśatakam 31
>
> "Everything in this life is fraught with fear.
>
> It is renunciation that makes one fearless."

When you come here, you lose the feeling of sectarianism – quarrels and arguments concerning religion disappear. Only one supreme truth becomes established in the mind – that the only thing needed in life is the worship of God – all else is illusion.

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1. Karma sannyasa.
2. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda: Volume 3; Lectures from Colombo to Almora; Address of Welcome at Almora and Reply.

Only God is the reality, all else unreal. Or, a bee doesn't buzz anymore when it sits on a lotus flower.

> "Strong souls will be attracted to this Father of Mountains in time to come, when all this fight between sects and all those differences in dogmas will not be remembered any more, and quarrels between your religion and my religion will have vanished altogether, when mankind will understand that there is but one Eternal Religion and that is the perception of the Divine within and the rest is mere froth; such ardent souls will come here, knowing that the world is but Vanity, knowing that everything is useless except the worship of the Lord and the Lord alone." (Speech at Almora.)

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Tie the knowledge of Advaita (non-dualism) to the end of your cloth and go anywhere you like." Swami Vivekananda engaged himself in work with the knot of Advaita tied to the end of his cloth. For the sannyasin, what are home, wealth, strangers and one's own family, homeland or foreign lands? Yajnavalkya said to Maitreyi, "Without realizing God, what use is wealth and education? Maitreyi, first know Him and then anything else." Swamiji propagated this very idea to the world. He said, "O, people of the world, first renounce sense pleasures and worship God in solitude. After this, you can do whatever you like. It will not cause any harm. Serve your country or, if you like, raise a family. There is no harm in any of these when you understand that He resides in all, that there is nothing else but He, that the world and your country are not without Him. After you have realized God, you will see that it is He alone who

dwells in the world." Rishi Vaishishtha Deva said to Ramachandra, "Rama, what you say, that you want to renounce the world – just reason it out with me. If God is outside the world, then renounce it."[1] Ramachandra had realized the Atman (Self), so he kept silent. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "First know how to use a dagger before you take it in your hand." Swami Vivekananda explained who a real karma yogi is. What good can he do for his country? Swamiji knew that there were other great things to do besides helping the poor with money. The main thing is to help them know God. After that comes learning, then the gift of life, then clothing and feeding the poor. How long can you end the miseries of the world? Sri Ramakrishna asked Krishnadas Pal,[2] "Well, what is the aim of life?" Krishnadas said, "In my opinion it is to do good to the world, to remove misery from the world." Thakur was irritated and responded, "You have the intelligence of the son of a widow![3] Why, how much can you save the world from its trials and tribulations? Is the world so small? Do you know that there are crabs in the Ganges in the rainy season? In the same way, there are innumerable universes. He who is the Master of this universe takes care of all of them. The goal of life is to know Him first. Then you may take up anything you like." Swamiji also said somewhere:

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1. Yogavashishtha.
2. Krishnadas Pal was a famous and wealthy man of Calcutta, a well-known philanthropist. He visited Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Temple.
3. Randi putti buddhi: low intelligence, having grown up flattering others and by other such means.

> "Spiritual knowledge is the only thing that can remove our miseries forever, and other knowledge satisfies wants only for a time... He who gives spiritual knowledge in the greatest benefactor of mankind... Next to spiritual help (Brahmajnana) comes intellectual help (Vidyadana), the gift of secular knowledge. This is far higher than the giving of food and clothes; the next gift is the gift of life, and the fourth, the gift of food. Karmayoga (New York), My plan of Campaign (Madras).

God-realization is the aim of life and it is the main interest in this country. First this, and then anything else. Politics shouldn't be talked about in the beginning. First meditate on God with a concentrated mind and see Him in your heart. Having realized Him, you'll be able to do good to your motherland because then your mind will be detached. You can't serve your country by thinking, "my country." It is the God in all that you can serve. Then you will not see any difference between your country and foreign countries. Then you will be able to truly see how you can do good to others. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Those who play the game of chess can't understand the right moves as well as unattached onlookers. They can suggest much better moves." This is because an unattached person needs nothing for himself. An unattached person who is free from attachment and malice, who is a spiritual personality, who is liberated in this very life, who has practiced spiritual disciplines for a long time and attained Him doesn't like anything else."

> And having gained which, he thinks that there is no greater gain than that, wherein established he is not

> shaken even by the heaviest affliction. (Bhagavata Gita 6:22)

For this reason, the politics and the social code of Hindus are all religious regulations. Manu, Yajnavalkya, Prashar and other great saints are the authors of these religious texts. They had no need of anything. Even so, having received the command of God they composed these scriptures for householders. Remaining unattached they suggested the right move in the chess game. For this reason, there is no possibility of any error in what they said due to place, time or character.

Swami Vivekananda was also a karma yogi. Remaining unattached, he took the vow of service to others. That is why he was so valuable a worker. Remaining detached, he did good for this country, the way the sages of yore worked incessantly for the good of humanity. May we be able to follow his footsteps on this path of religion without selfish desire.[1] But how difficult a thing it is. First we have to attain the lotus feet of Lord Hari. We have to practice renunciation and austere spiritual effort like Vivekananda. Only then may we be eligible.

Blessed are you, the all-renouncing personality. You have truly followed in the footsteps of your guru. You have truly practiced the great mantra of your gurudeva: first attain God, and then anything else. You understood that if you don't believe in God, this world is only a dreamlike magic show. That is why you renounced everything and devoted yourself to spiritual practice. When you saw that He is the life of all, when you saw that there is

1. Nishkama.

nothing but Him, then you put your mind on the world, O Mahayogin! You entered again the region of work for the service of Hari imminent in all. Thus all Hindus, Muslims, Christians, foreigners, wealthy, poor, all men and women became a part of your limitless love – you gave them all the embrace of ecstatic love. Overwhelmed with deep dispassion, leaving behind the mother who gave you birth, with tears flowing from your eyes, you put on the ochre robe and left. Later, to acknowledge her maternal love and to fulfill her desire, you came back to see that mother. You worked like Narada and Janaka to educate humanity.

Chapter V

Sri Ramakrishna, Narendra, Keshab Sen and worship of God with form

Is God with form or without form?

One day Keshab Chandra Sen, accompanied by his disciples, came to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Thakur talked with him about God without form for some time. The paramahamsa said to him, "I don't think of Kali as an image of clay or stone. She is Spirit. That which is Brahman is also Kali. When not acting, it is Brahman; when creating, preserving or destroying, it is Kali. Kali – that is, She who romances time.[1] Time, that is, Brahman." The following conversation took place that day:

1. Kala.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab*): "Do you know what it's like? Think of Sat-chit-ananda [Existence-Consciousness-Bliss] as an ocean – without any shore or limit. Due to the coolness of devotion, water freezes into ice at different places – into different forms. In other words, at times God reveals Himself as a form for the sake of his devotee. And when the sun of the knowledge of the Absolute rises, the ice melts – that is, one goes into samadhi and realizes that God is the only reality and the world is an illusion. All forms disappear. Then it's not possible to say in words what He is. You can't catch Him with your mind, reason or ego.

"A person who knows one thing properly can also know another. He who knows God without form can also know God with form. A person who hasn't gone to the neighborhood can't know where Shyampukur and Telipara are. Not everybody is able to worship God without form. So there's a great need for worship of God with form."

Explaining further, the paramahamsa says: "A mother has five sons. She has cooked fish in different ways to suit the digestion of her children. For one, she has made fish pulao. And for the son who has bad digestion, she has made fish soup – whatever suits the different boys.

"In this country people worship God with form. Christian missionaries from America and Europe brand Indians as uncivilized. They say that Indians are idol worshipers, that they are in miserable condition."

Swami Vivekananda explained for the first time in America the significance of God with form. He said, "Indians do not worship idols."

> "At the very outset I may tell you there is no polytheism in India. In every temple if one stands by and listens, he will find the worshippers applying all the attributes of God to these images." (Lectures on Hinduism, Chicago)

Swamiji explained with the help of psychology that nothing except God with form comes to mind when one begins to think of God. He said:

> "Why does a Christian go to Church? Why is the Cross holy? Why is the face turned toward the sky in prayers? Why are there so many images in the Catholic Church? Why are there so many images in the minds of Protestants when they pray? My brethren, we can no more think about anything without a material image than we can live without breathing. Omnipresence to almost the whole world means nothing. Has God a superficial area? If not, then when we repeat the word we think of the extended earth; that is all." (Lectures on Hinduism, Chicago)

Swamiji also said, "The worship of God with form and the formless God depends on the worshiper. The worship of God with form is not sinful[1] or illusory. It is a truth of the lower order.

"If a man can realize his divine nature easily with the help of an image, is it right to call it a sin? Nor even when he has passed that stage, should he call it an error. To the Hindu, man is not traveling from error to truth, but from lower to higher truth."

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1. Kusanskara.

Swamiji said that there could not be one rule for everybody. The Lord is one, but He appears in various forms before His different kinds of devotees. The Hindu understands this.

"Unity is variety in the plan of nature and the Hindu has recognized it. Other religions lay down certain fixed dogmas and try to force society to adopt them; they place before society one kind of coat which must fit Jack and John and Henry, all alike. If it does not fit John and Henry, he must go without a coat to cover his body. The Hindus have discovered that the Absolute can be realized, thought of, or stated only through the Relative."

Chapter VI

Sri Ramakrishna, Brahmo Samaj, Narendra and the Doctrine of Sin

Swamiji's spiritual preceptor, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, used to say, "By repeating the name of God and meditating on Him sincerely, sin vanishes. It's like a mountain of cotton that burns away instantly with the touch of fire. Or, imagine a group of birds perched on a tree. If you clap your hands, they fly away."

One day Thakur was talking with Keshab Babu.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab*): "It is the mind that binds, and then again it is the mind that liberates. I am liberated. Whether I live a worldly life or in a forest, how can I be bound? I am a child of God, the son of the King of kings. Who can bind me? If a snake bites, its venom dries up immediately if you say emphatically, 'No venom, no

venom.' Similarly, by saying repeatedly and firmly, 'I am not bound, no, I am not bound. I am free.' You in fact become that, you become free.

"Somebody gave me a book of the Christians, the Bible. I asked him to read out loud. It was full of nothing but sin and sin only. The person who says again and again, 'I am bound, I am bound,' in the end is indeed bound. The one who says day and night, 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner,' does become a sinner.

"A person should have such faith in the name of God as to say, 'since I have taken His name, can sin possibly reside in me?' What bondage is there then? What sin? Krishnakishore was an orthodox Hindu brahmin who observed all the rules of conduct. He went to Vrindavan. One day there he felt thirsty. Approaching a well, he saw a person standing at it. He said to him, 'Brother, can you give me some water to drink? Which caste do you belong to?' The man said, 'Maharaj, I belong to the low caste of cobblers.' Krishnakishore said, 'Just repeat the name of Shiva and draw me some water.'

"When you repeat the name of the Lord, it purifies both the body and the mind. Why just talk about sin and hell? Say once, 'I shall never again do the evil I have committed today' and have faith in His name."

Swamiji also spoke to Christians about this *sinism*. What sin? You are the children of Immortal Bliss! Your priests talk day and night of the fire of hell. Don't listen to them.

> "Ye are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings, Ye divinities on earth – sinners! It is a sin to call a man so. Come up, O lions! and shake off the delusion that you are sheep! You are souls immortal, spirits free and blest and eternal, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant; not you the servant of matter." (Lecture on Hinduism – Chicago)

Swamiji was asked to speak in Hartford in America. The American Consul here, Mr. Paterson, was present there and chaired the meeting. Swamiji again talked about the Christian doctrine of sin. If it is dark in the house, what good will it do to just to say, "Dark, dark!" You have to bring light.

> "Shall we advise men to kneel down and cry – O miserable sinner that I am! No, rather let us remind them of their divine nature … If the room is dark, do you go about striking your breast and crying, 'It is dark?' No, the only way to get in light is to strike a light and then the darkness goes. The only way to realise the Light above you is to strike the spiritual light within you and darkness of impurity and sin will flee away. Think of your higher Self, not of your lower."

Swamiji had heard a fable[1] from the Paramahamsa Deva. He told the same story. A tigress attacked a herd of goats. She was pregnant and ready to deliver. When she jumped, a cub was born, but she died. The cub began to grow up with the goats, eating grass with them and bleating *baa, baa* like them. In due course, it grew up. One day a tiger attacked the flock of goats. It was surprised to see a tiger eating grass and crying *baa baa*, and also running away like a goat when it saw the tiger.

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1. It is from the Akhyayika Sankhyadarshan – Section on Akhyayika.

It caught hold of the grown cub and brought it to a water pond. "You are also a tiger. Why do you eat grass and bleat? Look how I am eating meat. You eat it too. Look in the water and see that your face looks just like mine." The young tiger saw it and also had a taste of meat.

Chapter VII

Sri Ramakrishna, Vijay, Keshab, Narendra and the renunciation of 'lust and greed' – renunciation

One day Sri Ramakrishna was talking to Vijaykrishna Goswami at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Vijay*): "A person can't teach people without renouncing 'lust and greed.' Keshab Sen couldn't do it. Just see what happened at last. If, living in 'lust and greed,' you say that the world is transitory, that only God is eternal, many will not accept your words. You have treacle with you but you're saying to others, 'Don't eat treacle'. That's why, after giving it a lot of thought, Chaitanya Deva renounced the world. If he hadn't, no one could have been saved."

Vijay: "True sir, Chaitanya Deva said, 'It was to get rid of a cough that medicine from peepal seeds was prepared.[1] But it brought more trouble instead. The cough increased.' Many people of Navadvip began to make fun: 'Pundit Nimai is having a great time, brother. He has a beautiful wife. He has a great reputation, and no want of money. He is in great shape.'"

1 In other words, propagation of name of Hari at Navadwip.

Sri Ramakrishna: "If Keshab had renounced, he would have been able to do great work. If there is a scar on a goat's body, God doesn't accept it, it can't be offered to the deity. Unless a person has renounced, he doesn't have the authority to teach. How many people are going to listen to a person who is a householder?"

Swami Vivekananda renounced 'lust and greed.' That's why he had the capacity to teach people about God. Vivekananda is foremost amongst scholars of Vedanta, English and Philosophy. He is an extraordinary lecturer. Is this his only greatness? Sri Ramakrishna will answer this question. Addressing the devotees at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple in 1882, the paramahamsa said about Swami Vivekananda:

"You see this boy?[1] He's different here, a restless boy. But when he sits near his father, he's quiet like a bugbear.

And when he plays in the courtyard, he's quite another person. These boys belong to the class of the ever-perfect. They are never bound in the world. At quite an early age, their spiritual consciousness is roused and they turn towards God. They come to the world to teach people. Nothing in

1. Swami Vivekananda was then studying in the Assembly General College. He was nineteen or twenty years old. At the time his home was near the College in Shimulia. His father's name was Viswanath Dutta; he was an attorney in the High Court. The boy's childhood name was Narendra. He passed his B.A. from the College. Mr. Hastie was the principal. He had brothers and sisters. Swamiji was born on Monday, Pausha Sankranti, 1269 (B.Y.), 1863 A.D., time 6:30–33 am, 6 minutes before the sunrise. His died at the age of 39 years 5 months and 24 days.

the world attracts them – they are never attracted by 'lust and greed'.

In the Vedas there is mention of the homa bird that lives high in the sky. It lays its eggs in the sky. When an egg starts falling, it hatches as it falls. And as the young one falls, its eyes open and its feathers begin to grow. As soon as it opens its eyes, it becomes aware that it is falling and will soon be dashed to pieces when it hits the ground. It turns and flies straight up to its mother high above.

Vivekananda is this homa bird. He has one aim in life: to go to his mother in full flight before his body has touched the ground – that is, to take to the path of God before coming in contact with the world. Sri Ramakrishna said to Vidyasagar, "Learning! What will mere scholarship do for you? A vulture soars high up in the sky, but its gaze is fixed on the charnel pits below where the carcasses of dead animals are thrown. A scholar can recite many verses fluently – but where does his mind dwell? If his mind dwells on the lotus feet of the Lord, I respect him. But if it dwells on 'lust and greed,' I consider him dry straw."

Swami Vivekananda is not only a scholar, he is a sadhu, a highly elevated soul. It is not for his learning alone that the English and Americans waited on him like servants. They followed him as being a man of a different class. People are interested in honour, wealth, sense pleasures, learning and so forth – but he had just one aim: God-realization. In the song of the sannyasin, he himself says, "A sannyasin must renounce lust and greed."

Truth never comes where lust
and fame and greed
of gain reside. No man who
thinks of woman
As his wife can ever perfect be.
Nor he who owns however little,
nor he –
Whom anger chains
Can ever pass
Through Maya's gates,
So give these up, sannyasin bold, Say –
"Om Tat Sat Om!"

– Song of the Sannyasin.

In America, there was no want of temptation for him. His fame was worldwide, and extremely beautiful and well-educated women of high class families would come to talk to him and serve him. He had such an attractive power that many of those (ladies) wanted to marry him. An heiress came to him one day and said, "Swami, I have surrendered my all and myself to you." Swamiji said in reply, "Gentle lady, I am a sannyasin. I cannot marry. All women are like my mother to me." Blessed hero! You are the genuine disciple of the gurudeva! The mud of the earth has truly not touched your body. The stain of 'lust and greed' has not touched you at all. You did not flee from the kingdom of temptation, but living in it, staying in the land of riches, you advanced on the path to God. You did not want to spend your days like a common man.

You left this mortal world as a living example of divinity.

Chapter VIII

Sri Ramakrishna, Karma Yoga, Narendra and service of God in the poor (selfless work)

The paramahamsa used to say, "Everybody has to do his duty. Knowledge, devotion and work without attachment – these are the three paths to attainment of God." The Gita says: Both a sadhu and a householder first have to work without expectation of any reward according to the instructions of the guru in order to purify their minds. To think 'I am the doer' is ignorance; that wealth, people, work and activities – these are mine – is also ignorance. The Gita says: Knowing yourself not to be the doer, surrender the reward of your work to God and then perform whatever work you do. The Gita further says: Some people, even after attaining spiritual perfection, receive the divine command to work, like Janaka and others. This is the karma yoga that the Gita teaches. Sri Ramakrishna said the same thing.

So karma yoga is a very difficult path. Without practicing spiritual disciplines in seclusion for a sufficiently long period of time, one cannot work without attachment. During the time of spiritual disciplines, the guru's direction is essential. It is a period of immaturity, so one can easily fall prey to unforeseen attachment. He may think that he is serving selflessly and practicing charity without attachment solely in the name of God, but in reality he may be doing so to gain the admiration of the

world. He does not understand this. It is very difficult for an individual with hearth and home and family to learn to work for others without any motive, to understand *nishkama* karma, non-attachment.

But if an all-renouncing – a renunciate of 'lust and greed' – and perfected person works selflessly, people can easily understand and imitate him.

Swami Vivekananda renounced 'lust and greed'. He practiced spiritual disciplines in seclusion according to the instructions of his guru for a long time, and he perfected himself. Thus he was truly eligible to practice karma yoga. But he was a sannyasin. If he had wanted to, he could have lived with devotion and knowledge alone, like a rishi, or like his master, Paramahamsa Deva. But his life was not merely to serve as an example of renunciation. It was also to show people how to live unattached in the middle of the things that worldly people own. Like Narada, Sukadeva and Janaka, Swamiji has also shown this to the multitudes. Like a sannyasin, he considered wealth and name and fame the droppings of a crow – in other words, he did not indulge in them himself – yet he showed how to use them in the service of others by teaching as well as by practice. The money he collected from his friends in America and other foreign lands, he spent only for the good of humanity. He established monasteries at different places, such as Belur Math near Calcutta, Mayavati near Almora, at Kashi and at Madras. He served famine-stricken people in Dinajpur, Vaidyanath, Kishangarh, Dakshineswar and other places. He established orphanages during

times of famine for boys and girls without parents. He established an orphanage at Kishangarh in Rajputana. An orphanage still exists near Murshidabad (Bhavda) in the village of Sargachhi. He established a *seva-ashrama*[1] for the sick sadhus of Kankhal, near Hardwar. During the plague he sent relief for patients suffering from the epidemic that entailed a good deal of expenditure. He would sit alone, crying for the poor and the destitute, and he would say to his friends, "Alas, how they are suffering! They don't even have time to think of God."

All work except what the guru teaches is a cause for bondage. He was a sannyasin. What need did he have to work?

Who sows must reap, they say,
and, cause must bring
The sure effect. Good good;
bad bad; and none
Escape the law. But whoso
wears a form
Must wear the chain. Too true,
but far beyond
Both name and form is Atman,
ever free.
Know thou art that, Sannyasin bold!
Say "Om Tat Sat Om."

– The Song of the Sannyasin.

1. Home of service.

God made him do all this work to teach mankind. Now both sannyasins and householders will learn how to develop love and to work without attachment, such as practicing spiritual disciplines in solitude for a period of time, according to the instructions of the guru. Then they will be able to do charitable work like Swamiji did. Swamiji's guru, Sri Ramakrishna, used to say, "If you oil your hands before opening a jackfruit, its milky juice will not stick to them." In other words, by practicing spiritual disciplines in solitude and attaining love for God, worldly work can be accomplished in a detached way. By contemplating Swami Vivekananda's life, one can glimpse what spiritual discipline in solitude is and what work for the instruction of humanity is.

All the works of Swami Vivekananda were for the instruction of humanity.

> [By performing prescribed activities King Janaka and others certainly realized complete perfection; likewise you should perform [work] as well for the sake of benefiting the welfare of the world.] (Gita 3:20)

It has been mentioned in the Gita that karma yoga is extremely difficult. Janaka and others attained spiritual perfection through work. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Janaka had practiced a lot of difficult austerities in seclusion, in the forest, before that." That is why sadhus take to the path of knowledge and love of God and practice spiritual disciplines far from the noise and bustle of the world. Only a very competent person like Swami Vivekananda, a hero, is able to practice this karma

yoga. How many saintly persons of this class are on earth, those who experience God and yet work in the world unattached? How many religious teachers do you see going around actively engaged in the service of individual souls, intoxicated with the love of God, with no stain of 'lust and greed'?

Swamiji quoted the Gita in explaining the karma yoga of the Vedanta on 10 November 1896 in London:

> "Curiously enough the scene is laid on the battlefield where Krishna teaches the philosophy to Arjuna; and the doctrine which stands out luminously in every page of the Gita is intense activity, but in the midst of that, eternal calmness. And this idea is called the secret of work, to attain which is the goal of the Vedanta." (Practical Vedanta – London)

In the lecture Swamiji talked about the feeling of a sannyasin while performing karma yoga (calmness in the midst of activity). Swamiji tried to work without love or hate. He could do this only because of the quality of his spiritual practice and his experience of God. Such calmness is not possible without being spiritually perfect or an incarnation like Sri Krishna.

Chapter IX

Sri Ramakrishna's and Swami Vivekananda's instructions regarding spiritual disciplines with women (*vamachara*)

One day Swami Vivekananda went to the Dakshineswar Temple to see Sri Ramakrishna. Bhavanath and Baburam were there. It was 29 September 1884. Narendra raised the subject of the

Ghoshpara and Panchanami. He asked, "How do they practice spiritual disciplines with a woman as a partner?"

Thakur said to Narendra, "It's not for you to hear such things. The Kartabhaja, the Ghoshpara, the Panchanami and the Bhairava-Bhairavi cannot practice spiritual disciplines correctly – they experience a downfall. All these paths are dirty – they're not good. It is only good to take a pure path. They took me to a Bhairava circle in Kashi. There were Bhairava–Bhairavi couples. I was asked to drink wine. I said, 'Mother, I cannot touch wine.' They began drinking. I thought they would now practice japa and meditation. But they didn't. Instead, after drinking wine, they began to dance."

He further said to Narendra, "Do you know that I have the 'mother-child feeling,' the filial attitude? The attitude of a child to a mother is very pure – there's no danger in it. To look upon God as wife, 'the hero-attitude,' is very difficult – it can't be practiced correctly – a man experiences a downfall. You are my own, so I say to you, 'My last realization is this: He is full,[1] and I am just a part of Him; He is the Lord, and I am His servant. And sometimes I think, I am He and He is I; love[2] is the essence.'"

Another day, 9 September 1883, Thakur said to the devotees at Dakshineswar, "I have the attitude of a child. Achalananda sometimes came and stayed here. He would drink a lot of wine. Since I didn't approve of spiritual practice with women, he said,

1. Purna.
2. Bhakti.

'Why don't you approve of the hero-attitude? It's prescribed in the Tantra. Can you deny Shiva's direction? He (Shiva) talked about the attitude of the hero as well as the attitude of a child.'

"I said, 'I don't know why, but I don't like it. I have the attitude of a child.'

"There (in Thakur's village) I noticed Bhagi Tailin [an oil-woman] in the Kartabhaja group. They have the same discipline, with a woman as a partner – and a woman cannot practice religious discipline without a man. They call the man the Krishna of Love. He asks three times, 'Have you found Krishna?' And the woman also answers three times, 'I have found Krishna.'"

On another day, 23 March 1884, Sri Ramakrishna said to Rakhal, Ram and some other devotees, "Vaishnavcharan belonged to the Kartabhaja sect. When I went to that part of the country, to Shyambazar, I said to him, 'I don't like this. I have the attitude of a child with its mother.' I noticed that they talk big and perform adultery. These people don't like to worship the image of God – they prefer a living person. Many of them follow Radhatantra – the principles of the earth, fire, water, air and ether – excreta, urine, semen, sperm etc. are the principles of all these. It is a very bad practice – it's like entering a house through the latrine."

In accordance with Thakur's teaching, Swami Vivekananda also found fault with the practice of spiritual disciplines with women. He said, "Almost everywhere in India, particularly in Bengal, many

people practice it secretly and quote the Vamachara Tantra as their justification. It is best to give this up and teach the boys the Upanishads, the Gita and so on."

On his return from abroad, Swami Vivekananda delivered a very important lecture on Vedanta which carried a deep inner significance. He gave this lecture in the temple of Radhakanta Deva in Sobhabazar. In it he ran down the practice of spiritual practice with women as partners, saying:

> "Give up this filthy Vamachara that is killing your country. You have not seen the other parts of India. When I see how much the Vamachara has entered our society, I find it a most disgraceful place with all its boast of culture. These Vamachara sects are honeycombing our society in Bengal. Those who come out in the daytime and preach most loudly about *achara*,[1] it is they who carry on the most horrible debauchery at night, and are backed by the most dreadful books. They are ordered by the books to do these things. You who are of Bengal know it. The Bengali shastras are the Vamachara Tantras. They are published by the cartload, and you poison the minds of your children with them instead of teaching them your shrutis.[2] Fathers of Calcutta, do you not feel ashamed that such horrible stuff as these Vamachara Tantras, with translations too, should be put into the hands of your boys and girls, and their minds poisoned, and that they should be brought up with the idea that these are the shastras of the Hindus? If you are ashamed, take them away from your children and let them read the true shastras,[3] the Vedas, the Gita, the Upanishads." (Reply to Calcutta address at Shovabazar.)

1. Good behavior.
2. The Vedas.
3. Sacred scripture.

One day when Sri Ramakrishna was lying ill at the Cossipore Garden house (in 1886), he sent for Narendra and said to him "Son, see that nobody drinks wine here. It's not good to drink wine in the name of religion. I have seen that it has done nothing good where people have done so."

Chapter X

Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and the doctrine of incarnation of God

One day Sri Ramakrishna was sitting with Baburam and other devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple – 7 March 1885, the time about 3:00 or 4:00 p.m.

The devotees were gently stroking Thakur's feet. He smiled a little to a devotee and said, "There's a lot of meaning in this service (stroking of the feet)."

Then putting his hand on his heart, he said, "If there's anything inside here, you will be rid of ignorance and illusion in no time (by stroking the feet)."

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna became very serious, as though he were going to divulge a secret: "There is no outsider here. I'm telling you a secret. The other day I saw Sat-chit-ananda come out from inside me and take a form. It said, 'I do incarnate from age to age.' I saw the fullest manifestation, but with the glorious quality of sattva."

The devotees listened to these words without saying anything. Some of them were remembering the great words of Sri Krishna in the Gita:

> [Whenever there is decay of righteousness, O Bharata, and rise in unrighteousness, I manifest Myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of righteousness, I am born in every age.] (Bhagavad Gita 4:7-8)

On another day, 1 September 1885, the birthday of Sri Krishna, Janmashtami day, Narendra and other devotees had come to Dakshineswar. Girish Ghosh and a couple of his friends had arrived by carriage. He was crying. Sri Ramakrishna patted him affectionately.

Lifting his head and folding his hands, Girish had said, "You yourself are the Supreme Brahman. If that is not so, everything is illusion. I regret that I have not been able to serve you. Grant me, O Lord, that I may serve you for a year."

When he sang hymns of praise again and again to Sri Ramakrishna as the Lord, Thakur said, "Shame! You must not say such things; a devotee cannot be treated like a Krishna. You may think as you please – a guru is the Lord Himself – but it is wrong to speak of such things."

Girish again praised Thakur, "Lord, give me purity so my mind will not have the least sinful thought."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You are already pure. You have such faith and devotion to God."

One day, on the day of throwing color (dol yatra), the 1st of March 1885, Narendra and other devotees had arrived. It is on this day that Thakur instructed Narendra on renunciation and said, "Son, you will not succeed without renouncing 'lust

and greed.' Only God is eternal; everything else is transitory." As he talked, he was filled with emotion, his look full of compassion and affection. Consumed with feeling, he sang:

> Afraid am I to speak a word to you; equally afraid am I not to speak.
>
> The fear that arises in my mind is that I may lose you, yes, be robbed of you, my wealth, my treasure!
>
> I teach you the *mantra* (holy name) that is to bring you to Your Beloved.
>
> Now ready yourself to receive it, which enables us to steer the ship safely to land.

It was as if Sri Ramakrishna was afraid Narendra might go to someone else – be no longer his – that he might enter worldly life later on. He said, "I know the sacred mantra I have given you is the only mantra for you. I have given you the mantra for the highest ideal of life – renouncing all and taking refuge in God." Narendra looked at Sri Ramakrishna with eyes full of tears.

That same day Thakur said to Narendra, "Did anything that Girish say agree with your own ideas?"

Narendra: "I didn't say anything. It's he who says he has the faith that you are an incarnation of God. I didn't say anything."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Such firm faith! Did you notice?"

After a few days Thakur and Narendra talked about the incarnation of God. Thakur says, "Well, some people say I'm an incarnation of God. What do you think?"

Narendra said, "I won't say anything about what others think. I will only speak when I understand myself, when I begin to believe it myself."

One day when Thakur was restless in the Cossipore garden house because of the pain from the cancer, when he could not even swallow rice gruel, Narendra, sitting near him, thought to himself, "If, in such a pain as this, he says that he is an incarnation of God, I will believe it." The same moment Thakur said, "He who was Rama, He who was Krishna, has manifested Himself in the form of Ramakrishna for the sake of His devotees." Hearing it, Narendra was speechless.

After Thakur passed away,[1] Narendra embraced sannyasa and devoted himself to austere spiritual practices. Then all Thakur's great statements about incarnation became enshrined in his heart more firmly. He began to explain this truth more clearly in his native land and abroad.

When Swamiji was in America he wrote in English the book Bhakti Yoga, basing it on the Narada Sutras and other such books. He says in it, too, that incarnations of God awaken the spiritual consciousness of people by their mere touch. By their touch even the wicked become great saints. "Even a person of the vilest conduct who worships me and depends on me entirely should be considered holy, for he is truly resolved."[2] God

1. Left his own *dham*.
2. Srimad Bhagavad Gita, 9:30 – Even if the vilest sinner worships Me with exclusive devotion, he should be regarded a saint; for, he

Himself comes to us as an incarnation. If we want to realize God, we will see Him in an incarnation. We cannot help but worship him.

> "Higher and nobler than all ordinary ones, are another set of teachers, the Avataras of Ishvara, in the world. They can transmit spirituality with a touch, even with a mere wish. The lowest and the most degraded characters become in one second saints at their command. They are the teachers of all teachers, the highest manifestation of God through man. We cannot see God except through them. We cannot help worshipping them; and indeed they are the only ones whom we are bound to worship. (Bhakti Yoga)

He also says: As long as we are in the human body and worship God, we cannot help but worship an incarnation. Talk as long as you want, but you cannot think of God except as a human being. What you say about the nature of God with your little intelligence is nonsense. Whatever you say, it will have little value – it will be mere froth.

> "As long as we are men, we must worship Him in man and as man. Talk as you may, try as you may, you cannot think of God except as a man. You may deliver great intellectual discourses on God and on all things under the sun, become great rationalists and prove to your satisfaction that all these accounts of the Avatars of God as man are nonsense; but let us come for a moment to practical common sense. What is there behind this kind of remarkable intellect? Zero, nothing, simply so much froth. When next you hear a man delivering a great intellectual lecture against this worship of the Avatar of God, get hold of him and ask him what his idea of God is, what he understands

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has rightly resolved. (He is positive in his belief that there is nothing like devoted worship of God).

> by 'Omnipotence,' 'Omnipresence' and all similar terms beyond the spelling of the words. He really means nothing by them; he cannot formulate as their meaning any idea unaffected by his own human nature; he is no better off in this matter than the man in the street who has not read a single book." (Bhakti Yoga)

Swamiji went to America again in 1899. In 1900 he gave a lecture in Los Angeles in the state of California on Christ the Messenger. Swamiji said, you will have to see God in the incarnation (in the Son). We may have God within us but there is greater manifestation of Him in His incarnation. There are vibrations of light everywhere, but all darkness is dispelled when big lamps are lit.

> "It has been said by the same Messenger (Christ), 'None, hath seen God, but they have seen the son' and that is true. And where to see God but in the Son? It is true that you and I and the poorest of us, the meanest even, embody that God – even reflect that God. The vibration of light is everywhere, Omnipresent; but we have to strike the light of the lamp before we can see the light. The Omnipresent God of the universe cannot be seen until He is reflected by these giant lamps of the earth; the Prophets, the Man-Gods, the Incarnation, the embodiments of God." (Christ, the Messenger)

Swamiji also said, "You may imagine the real nature of God as much as you can, but you will find that your imagined God is far below that of an incarnation of God. What harm is there in worshipping these God-men? No, there is no harm in worshipping them. Not only that, if you wish to worship God you will have to worship an incarnation. You are human beings, so there is no way but to worship God in a human being."

> "Take one of these great Messengers of light, compare his character with the highest ideal of God that you have ever formed, and you will find that your God falls short of the ideal, and that the character of the prophet exceeds your conception. You cannot form a higher ideal of God than what the actually embodied have practically realized and set before us as an example. Is it wrong, therefore, to worship these as a God? Is it a sin to fall at the feet of these man-Gods and worship them as the only divine beings in the world? If they are really, actually, higher than all our conceptions of God, what harm is there in worshipping them? Not only is there no harm; but it is the only possible and positive way of worship." (Christ, the Messenger)

Signs of an incarnation – Jesus Christ

What do incarnations of God come to proclaim? Sri Ramakrishna said to Narendra, "Son, it will not do to not give up 'lust and greed.' Only God is real – nothing else lasts." Swamiji also said to the Americans:

> "We see in the life of Christ the first watchword, 'Not this life, but something higher!' No faith in this world and all its belongings! It is evanescent; it goes!"

Jesus had renounced 'lust and greed'. He knew that the soul is neither male nor female. An incarnation of God does not look for money, name and fame, pleasure, sense satisfactions – none of these. For him, "me" and "mine" have no meaning. The feelings "I am the doer, this house is mine, this is my family etc." are all illusions born of ignorance.

> "We still have fondness for 'me' and 'mine.' We want property, money, wealth. Woe unto us; let us confess; and not put to shame that great Teacher of humanity! He (Jesus) had no family ties. But do you think that

> that man had any physical ideas in him? Do you think that this mass of Light, this God and Not-man, came down to earth to be the brother of animals? And yet they make him preach all sorts, even of low sexual things. He had none! He was a soul! Nothing but a soul, just working, as it were, in a body for the good of humanity; and that was all his relation to the body. Oh, nor that! In the soul there is neither man, nor woman. No, no. The disembodied soul has no relationship to animal, no relationship to the body. The ideal may be high; away beyond us. Never mind; it is the Ideal. Let us confess it so – that we cannot approach it yet." (Christ, the Messenger)

And he also said to the Americans, "What else does an incarnation say? You see me, but you cannot see God? But He and I are one. He is known by the pure mind within the heart."

> "Thou hast seen me and not seen the Father? I and my Father are one! The kingdom of Heaven is within you! If I am pure enough I will also find in the heart of my heart, I and my Father are one. That was what Jesus of Nazareth said." (Christ, the Messenger)

In this lecture at another place, Swamiji said, "An incarnation assumes a body in every age to establish religion. He comes down like Christ at different times and places. Just by wanting to, he can pardon our sins – he can liberate us (vicarious atonement). May we worship them always."

> "Let us, therefore, find God not only in Jesus of Nazareth, but in all the great ones that have preceded him, in all that came after him, and all that are yet to come. Our worship is unbounded and free. They are all manifestations of the same infinite God. They are all pure and unselfish; they struggled and gave up their lives for us, poor human beings. They all and each of them bore vicarious atonement for every one of

us and also for all that are to come hereafter." (Christ, the Messenger)

Jnana Yoga and Swami Vivekananda

Swamiji would advise people to talk about Vedanta, but he would also point out difficulties associated with discussion. When Thakur talked to Pundit Shashadhar in Thanthania in 1884, Narendra and many other devotees were there.

Thakur had said, "The path of knowledge is very difficult to practice in this age. Life depends on food, and this requires hard work – but life is short. And it is impossible to get rid of body-consciousness. On the other hand, until you can get rid of body-consciousness completely, you can't attain the knowledge of the Absolute. A man of knowledge says, 'I myself am that Brahman. I am not the body – I am beyond hunger, thirst, disease, sorrow, birth, death, happiness, pain, and so on.' So if you have disease, sorrow, happiness, pain, how can you be a knower of the Absolute? It's just as if your hand is cut by thorns and is bleeding profusely and is very painful, but you say, 'Why my hand has not been cut, there is nothing wrong with me.'

"So the path of devotion is for this age. It is easier to reach God by it than by other paths. You can reach God by jnana yoga or karma yoga or other paths, but they are all difficult paths."

Thakur also said, "Whatever work remains complete has to be done selflessly. When the mind is purified by selfless work without expecting any reward, a person develops love and devotion for God. God is realized by such devotion."

Swamiji said, "As long as there is body-consciousness, the realization that 'I am He' [*So 'ham*] cannot be had. In other words, when one is rid of all desires, when one has completely renounced everything, one attains union with God [samadhi]. Only by attaining samadhi, does one attain the knowledge of the Absolute. Bhakti yoga is natural and sweet."

> "Jnana yoga is grand, it is high philosophy; and almost every human being thinks curiously enough that he can surely do everything required of him by philosophy. But it is really very difficult to live truly the life of philosophy. We are often apt to run into great dangers in trying to guide our life by philosophy. This world may be said to be divided between persons of demonic nature who think the caretaking of the body to be the be-all and end-all of existence, and persons of godly nature, who realize that the body is simply a means to an end, and instrument intended for the culture of the soul. The devil can and indeed does quote the scriptures for his own purpose, and thus the way of knowledge often appears to offer justification to what the bad man does as much as it offers inducements to what the good man does. This is the great danger in jnana yoga. But bhakti yoga is natural, sweet and gentle; the bhakta does not take such high flights as the jnana yogi, and therefore he is not apt to have such big falls." (Bhakti Yoga)

Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation? Swamiji's faith

Swamiji delivered a lecture on the sages of India. In it he said several things about incarnations of God. He talked about Sri Ramachandra, Sri Krishna, the Buddha, Ramanuja, Shankaracharya, Chaitanya Deva, and

about their lives. When righteousness[1] declines and lack of religion[2] rises, sages appear from age to age to save the good and destroy wickedness. The Lord says so in the Gita. Swamiji elucidated it:

> "Whenever virtue subsides and irreligion prevails I create myself for the protection of the good and for the destruction of all immorality I come from time to time." (The Sages of India)

And then he said, "Sri Krishna harmonised religions in the Gita."

> "In the Gita we already hear the distant sound of the conflicts of seers, and the Lord comes in the middle to harmonise them all. He, the great preacher of Harmony, the greatest Teacher of Harmony, Lord Krishna himself.

"Sri Krishna also said in the Gita, 'Women, Vaishya, shudra, all will attain supreme liberation, not to speak of brahmins and kshatriyas.'"

The Buddha is the deity of the destitute – sarvabhūtasthamātmānaṁ [gītā 6-29]. He showed from his work that God resides in all elements. The disciples of the Buddha did not believe in the Atman or the individual soul. So Shankaracharya again propagated the religion of the Vedas. He began to explain the tenets of Advaita and the qualified non-dualism[3] of Ramanuja. After him, Chaitanya Deva incarnated to teach love and devotion. Shankara and Ramanuja distinguished between the castes, but Chaitanya Deva didn't. What castes can there be for devotees?

---

1. Dharma.
2. Adharma.
3. Vishishtadvaita.

Next Swamiji spoke of Sri Ramakrishna: In him Shankaracharya's power of knowledge and the intense love of Chaitanya manifested together in the same person. Then Sri Krishna's harmony of religions was spoken of again, followed by the cry of one who wept like Buddha Deva for the poor, the aggrieved and the sinful. It is as if none of these incarnations was a full manifestation. Sri Ramakrishna was the fulfillment of all the sages.

"The one (Sankara) had a great head, the other (Chaitanya) a large heart, and the time was ripe for one to be born, the embodiment of both head and heart; the time was ripe for one to be born who in one body would have the brilliant intellect of Sankara and the wonderfully expansive, infinite heart of Chaitanya; 'One who would see in every sect the same spirit working, the same God; one who would see God in every being, one whose heart would weep for the poor, for the weak, for the out-caste, for the down-trodden, for everyone in this world, inside India or outside India; and at the same time whose grand brilliant intellect, would conceive of such noble thoughts as would harmonise all conflicting sects, not only in India but outside of India, and bring a marvelous harmony, the universal Religion of head and heart, into existence.

"Such a man was born, and I had the good fortune to sit at his feet for years. The time was ripe, it was necessary that such a man should be born, and he came; and the most wonderful part of it was that his life's work was just near a city which was full of western thought, a city which had run mad after these occidental ideas, a city which had become more Europeanised than any other city in India. There he lived without any book-learning whatsoever; this great intellect never learnt even to write his own name, but the most brilliant graduates of our

> University found in him an intellectual giant. He was a strange man, this Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. It is a long, long story, and I have no time to tell anything about him tonight. Let me now only mention the great Sri Ramakrishna, the fulfillment of the Indian sages, the sages for the time, one whose teaching is just now at the present time most beneficial. And mark the Divine power working behind the man. The son of a poor priest, born in a out-of-the-way village, unknown and unthought of, today is worshipped literally by thousands in Europe and America. And tomorrow will be worshipped by thousands more. Who knows the plans of the Lord! Now my brothers, if you do not see the hand, the fingers of Providence, it is because you are blind, born blind indeed." (The Sages of India)

Swamiji continued, "The divine words of the Vedas which the sages had heard on the bank of the Saraswati, those words which once reverberated in the ears of the great yogis and austere hermits practicing austerities on the peaks of the great Himalayas; or the words which, taking the shape of the fast flowing river containing all within itself, encompassing the names of Sri Krishna, Sri Buddha Deva, and Sri Chaitanya, entered this mortal world. Those very words are heard again today. Their great message will reach all places in a short period of time – India to begin with, and then everywhere to the length and breadth of the world. These words are gaining power every day from a new power. These divine words have been heard before many times in earlier ages, but what we hear today is the summation of them all."

> "Once more the wheel is turning up, once more vibrations have been set in motion from India, which are destined at no distant day to reach the farthest

> limits of the earth. One voice has spoken, whose echoes are rolling on and gathering strength every day, a voice even mightier than those which have preceded it, for it is the summation of them all. Once more the voice, that spoke to the sages on the banks of the Saraswati, the voice whose echoes reverberated from peak to peak of the 'Father of Mountains' and descended upon the plains through Krishna, Buddha and Chaitanya, in all-carrying floods has spoken again. Once more the doors have opened. Enter ye into the realms of light, the gates have been opened wide once more." (Reply to Khetri address)

Swamiji said further, "If I have spoken the truth even once, know that it is all Sri Ramakrishna's, and if I have said anything imperfect, those which are not"

> "Only let me say now that if I have told you one word of Truth, it was his and his alone; and if I have told you any things which were not true, were not correct, which were not beneficial to the human race, they were all mine, and on me is the responsibility."

This is how Swami Vivekananda announced the advent of the incarnation Sri Ramakrishna in different places in India. Wherever a Math has been established, Sri Ramakrishna is worshipped daily. In all these places at the time of arati, the hymn composed by Swamiji is sung accompanied by musical instruments. In this hymn Swamiji addresses Sri Ramakrishna as attributeless, with attributes, perfect[1] and Lord of the universe. And he called him the pilot to steer one across the ocean of the world. "You have come as a human being to liberate us from the bonds of the world, to help us to attain union with God. It is by your grace that I

1. Niranjan.

have attained samadhi. You have made me renounce 'lust and greed'. O refuge of devotees, give me devotion to your lotus feet. Your lotus feet are my supreme treasure. If I have them, the ocean of the world appears like a pit made by cow's feet."

Hymn to Sri Ramakrishna composed by Swamiji

Mitra chautal

Breaker of this world's chain,
We adore you, whom all men love;
spotless, taking man's form,
O purifier, you are
Above the gunas three.
Knowledge divine, not flesh;
You whom the cosmos wears,
A diamond, at its heart.

Let us look deep in your eyes –
They are bright with the wisdom of God,
That can wake us from Maya's spell.
Let us hold fast to your feet
Treading the waves of the world
To safety. O drunk with love,
God-drunken lover, in you
all paths of all yogas meet.

Lord of the worlds, you are ours,
Who were born a child of our time,

Easy of access to me.
O merciful, if we take
Any hold upon God in our prayer,
It is by your grace alone,
Since all your austerities
Were practiced for our sake.

How great was your sacrifice;
Freely choosing your birth
In this prison, our Iron Age,
Perfect, whom lust could not taint
Nor passion nor gold draw near;
O master of all who renounce,
Fill our hearts full of love for you.

You have finished with fear and with doubt,
Standing firm in the vision of God:
Refuge to all who have cast
Fame, fortune, and friends away
Without question, you shelter us,
And the world's great sea in its wrath
Seems shrunk to the puddle that fills
A hoof-print in the clay.

Speech cannot hold you, nor mind,
Yet without you we think not, nor speak.
Love, who is partial to none,
We are equal before your sight.

Taker away of our pain,

We salute you, though we are blind;

Come to the heart's black cave

And illumine, O light of the Light!

He who was Rama, He who was Krishna, is now Ramakrishna

Swamiji heard these great words from Sri Ramakrishna in the Cossipore garden house. Remembering them on his return to Calcutta from abroad, Swamiji composed a hymn at Belur Math. In it he said, "He who was the friend of the humble, the poor, the destitute, the beloved of Janki (Sita), the incarnation of knowledge and devotion, Sri Ramachandra – and He who blew the sweet, solemn notes of the Gita at Kurukshetra as Sri Krishna – has now manifested as the renowned person Sri Ramakrishna.

Om namo bhagavate Ramakrishnaye

He who was Sri Rama, whose stream of love flowed with compelling might to even the Chandala (the outcast); O, he who was ever engaged in doing good to the world though by nature he was above it, whose renown is unequalled in the three worlds, Sita's beloved, whose body of knowledge supreme was covered by sweet devotion in the form of Sita;

He who quelled the terrible uproar at the battle (Kurukshetra), who removed terrible night of ignorance born of nature (of Arjuna), and who roared out like a lion the sweet and peaceful Gita; that renowned soul is born now as Sri Ramakrishna.

And another hymn is sung at evening worship at Belur Math, Kashi, Madras, Dhaka and at all other Maths.

In this hymn Swamiji says, "O friend of the lowly, you possess [the three] attributes and yet you are beyond the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. Since I do not worship your lotus feet day and night, I therefore take refuge in you. I repeat your name with my lips, I talk of spiritual wisdom – but I do not realize anything. Therefore I take refuge in you. One conquers death by meditating on your lotus feet – so I take refuge in you. O, friend of the humble! You are the one thing worth aspiring to in this world. I take refuge in you – tvameva śaraṇam mama dīnabandho."

> You are to be adored, you are truth unchanging, you are Lord of the gunas. In my weakness I have failed, O taker-away of delusion to worship your blessed lotus feet earnestly and unceasingly.
>
> Therefore I claim sanctuary in you, O friend of the lowly.
>
> This evil dream called life can be dispelled by love, adoration, and understanding;
>
> These three can bring us quickly to our goal: the truth of Brahman.
>
> But, alas, though I speak these words with my lips, they find no answer in my heart.
>
> Therefore I claim sanctuary in you, O friend of the lowly.
>
> O Ramakrishna, you are the path that leads to truth.
>
> If a man offers you his heart, he soon overcomes the world and finds fullness in eternal life;
>
> For your feet still the waves of death and bring immortality into the world of mortals.
>
> Therefore I take sanctuary in you, O friend of the lowly.
>
> Lord, your name, the name Ramakrishna, is goodness and purity itself; graciously it awakens us from our delusion.

He who chants your name will become a saint, though he be a sinner.

You are the refuge of us all. I have no other refuge but you.

Therefore I take sanctuary in you, O friend of the lowly.

After the arati was over, Swamiji taught how to offer salutations to Sri Ramakrishna. In this he says that Thakur is the greatest of all incarnations:

Om, salutations to you, Ramakrishna, the foundation of virtue and the embodiment of all religion, the most universal of incarnations.[1]

1. om sthāpakāaya ca dharmasya sarvadharmasvarūpiṇe,
avatāravariṣṭhāya rāmakṛṣṇāya te namaḥ.

Appendix II

Sri Ramakrishna and Bankim

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna and devotees sing joyfully at Adharlal Sen's house – conversation with Bankim Chandra Chatterji

Today is Saturday, 6 December 1884, 22nd of Agrahayana, the fourth day of the dark fortnight and Thakur has come to Adhar's house. He has arrived on the day of the pushya constellation of stars.

Adhar is a great devotee. A deputy magistrate, he is twenty-nine or thirty years old. Thakur is very fond of him and Adhar is very devoted to him. Almost every day, after working the whole day at his office, he goes home to wash his face and hands and then goes to see Sri Ramakrishna. His home is in Benetola in Sobhabazar. From there he goes by carriage to visit Thakur at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. He spends two and a half rupees every time to hire a carriage, for the sole joy of seeing Thakur – it is often not possible for him to hear Thakur speak. Reaching Dakshineswar, he would lie prostrate to salute Thakur, and after exchanging polite enquiries, would go to the Kali Temple. Then he would rest on a mat spread on the floor. Thakur himself would ask him to rest. Because of the hard work he had done all day, Adhar would be so tired that he would soon fall asleep. At nine or ten in the evening they would

wake him up. He would get up and salute Thakur and then again board the carriage to return home.

Adhar would often take Thakur to his home in Sobhabazar. These occasions would be a kind of celebration. Adhar thoroughly enjoyed himself in Thakur's company and in the company of the devotees and he fed them with various refreshments to their great pleasure.

One day when Thakur went there Adhar said, "You haven't been here for a long time. The house seems gloomy, even as if it had a smell. But see how nice it looks now, and how fragrant it has become. I prayed to God for a long time today – my eyes even began to water." Thakur said, "My dear, is that true?" He looked at Adhar affectionately and began to smile.

They are going to celebrate today as well. Thakur and the devotees are filled with joy because wherever Thakur is present, there will be no other talk than of God. There are many devotees and also some newcomers. Adhar has invited several deputy magistrates who will meet Thakur and give their opinion as to whether or not Thakur is a genuine saint.

Sri Ramakrishna smiles when he talks with the devotees. Adhar comes in with a number of his friends and sits near Thakur.

Adhar (*to Thakur, pointing to Bankim*): "Sir, he is a very learned man. He has written many books. He has come to see you. His name is Bankim Babu."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Bankim! For whose feelings have you become bankim [bent]?"

Bankim (*smiling*): "Well, sir, it's because of the kicks. (*All laugh*.) I am bent because of the kicks of our foreign bosses."

Bankim and Radha-Krishna – the two-in-one explained

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, my dear. You are bent like Sri Krishna, out of love for Srimati (Radha). Some people explain Krishna's pose as 'thrice bent in love for Radha'. Do you know why he is black and is only fourteen spans of a hand – so short? As long as God is far away, He appears dark, just like ocean water looks blue from a distance. But it is not dark when you go near it and take some in your palm – then it is transparent. The sun, seen from a distance, looks very small, but it is not small if you go near it. When you know God's real and true nature, He is no longer dark. But this is experienced only in samadhi. As long as 'I and you' endures, names and form also exist. It is all God's play. As long as 'I and you' persist, God is manifest in different forms.

"Sri Krishna is Purusha [pure Consciousness] and Radha is Primal Energy, Shakti, its dynamic aspect. They represent different aspects of the same Reality. What is the significance of the dual image? That Purusha and Prakriti are one and the same – they are not separate. Purusha cannot live without Prakriti, and Prakriti cannot exist without Purusha. Talk of one and you have to recognize the other. It's like fire and its power to burn – you can't think of fire without its power to burn. And you

can't think of burning power without fire. So in this dual image the gaze of Sri Krishna is on Radha, and that of Radha on Krishna. Srimati's complexion is white, like lightening, and she wears blue clothes. She also wears a blue jewel.[1] She has anklets on her feet and Sri Krishna also wears them. In other words, the union of Purusha and Prakriti conform both internally and externally."

When this conversation is over, Bankim and Adhar's other friends began to whisper to each other in English.

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing, to Bankim*): "My dear, what are you talking about in English?" (*All laugh.*)

Adhar: "Just your explanation of Krishna's form."

Sri Ramakrishna (*laughing, to all*): "I'm laughing at a story that's come to my mind. Listen. A gentleman went for a haircut. The barber inadvertently nicked him. The gentleman shouted, 'Damn!' The barber didn't know the meaning of damn. He put down the razor and the rest of his equipment and rolled up his sleeves (it was winter). He said, 'You have called me damn. Tell me what it means.' The gentleman said, 'Please go on with your shave. It doesn't mean much. But do it a little more carefully.' But the barber was not the man to leave it alone. He said, 'If damn means good, I am damn, my father is damn and my fourteen generations of ancestors are damn. (*All laugh.*) And if it means bad, then you are damn, your father is

1. Nilkanta mani.

damn and your fourteen generations of ancestors are damn.' (*All laugh.*) Not only damn once but damn, damn, damn and damn!"

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna and the work of preaching

When their laughter has abated, Bankim begins the conversation again.

Bankim: "Sir, why don't you preach?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Preaching! It comes from pride. Man is an imperfect creature. Only the one who has created the moon and the sun and is lighting up the world can preach. Is it an ordinary thing? Until He manifests Himself and commands you, preaching is not possible. Why? Unless there is God's command, people go on talking nonsense. Some listen to you for a couple of days but forget – it's only a short-lived fancy and nothing else. As long as you talk people will say, 'Oh, how nicely he speaks.' But when you stop, there's nothing left.

"As long as fire is under the milk pot, the milk will boil and make a gurgling sound. Pull out the firewood and the milk is as it was before. Only it's deflated.

"A person should add to his power by spiritual effort. Without it, preaching is not possible. 'You have no place to sleep and you call out: O Shankara, come here and lie down and sleep with me!' (*Laughter.*)

"People used to defecate daily on the bank of Haldarpukur in the countryside and others would

hurl insults at them the next morning. It did not end in spite of their insults. At last the people petitioned the Company (Government), which put up a notice, 'Defecation and urination are prohibited here. If you do, you will be prosecuted.' It all stopped, immediately – no more trouble. It was the Company's order – everybody had to obey.

"Similarly, preaching is only possible and people able to be taught only if God reveals himself to you and gives you the command to preach. Without it, who will come listen to you?"

Everybody listens intently and with concentration to Thakur's words.

Bankim and the other world

Life after Death – argument from analogy

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bankim*): "Well, you are a very learned man and you have written so many books. What do you say: what is the duty of man? What will go with us when we die? Is there a hereafter?"

Bankim: "Hereafter! What is that?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, after attaining knowledge, you don't have to go to another world – there is no rebirth. But until you attain knowledge, until you realize God, you will have to return to this world – there is no release. The hereafter will exist for you that long. But when you attain knowledge, when you realize God, you are liberated and don't have to be reborn in this world. Boiled paddy will not sprout and grow into a plant. If somebody is boiled in the fire of knowledge, he can no longer

take part in the game of creation – he cannot lead a worldly life – he is not attracted by 'lust and greed.' What can boiled paddy yield in a field?"

Bankim (*laughing*): "Sir, even weeds are useless."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But a man of knowledge is not a useless plant in this sense: a person who has realized God has gained the fruit of immortality, not a gourd. He isn't born again – whether on earth, on the region of the sun, or on the region of the moon. He doesn't have to go anywhere.

"All analogies have only one point of reference. You are a learned man. Haven't you studied logic? When you say a person is 'terrible like a lion', it doesn't mean he has a terrifying tail or a bone in its mouth. (*All laugh.*)

"I said the same thing to Keshab Sen. Keshab asked whether or not there was a hereafter. I didn't talk either of this life or another. I said, 'A potter puts his clay pots in the sun to dry. A few of them are baked, the others are unbaked. Sometimes cows or other animals walk on them. If the baked pots are broken, the potter throws them away. But if the unbaked ones break, he picks them up and mixes them with water again and fashions new pots on his wheel. They're not thrown away.' So I said to Keshab Sen, 'As long as the pots are unbaked, the potter won't throw them away. As long as a person doesn't attain knowledge, realize God, the potter will put him on his wheel again. He won't let him go.' In other words, he will have to be reborn on this earth again – no deliverance for him. A person is

liberated only when he realizes God. Only then will the potter let him go – because he is no longer of any use for Maya's creation. A jnani goes beyond maya. What purpose can he serve again in the world of maya?

"But He keeps some in the world of maya to instruct others. A jnani lives in the world taking refuge in vidya maya. God Himself keeps him there to work for Him – for example, Sukadeva or Shankaracharya.

(*To Bankim*) "Well, what do you say? What is man's duty?"

Bankim (*laughing*): "Since you ask, it is eating, sleeping and procreating."

Sri Ramakrishna (*irritated*): "What! You are a scoundrel! What you do day and night is coming out of your mouth. A man belches what he eats: if he eats radish, he belches radish, or he belches coconut if he eats coconut. You live day and night in the midst of 'lust and greed,' so that's what you're belching out. If you only think of worldly things, you develop the nature of a revenue record-keeper – you become dishonest. By thinking of God, a person becomes trustworthy. Nobody who has attained God will say such a thing."

Bankim – mere learning and 'lust and greed'

(*To Bankim*) "What is the use of being learned if you don't think about God, if you have no discrimination and dispassion? How can learning help if the mind is on 'lust and greed'?

"Kites and the vultures soar high, but their sight is fixed on charnel pits. A pundit reads many books and can quote many scriptures or has written books. But he is only attached to his wife and thinks money and fame is the secret of life. What kind of pundit is he? What is a pundit without God on his mind?

"Some people think that people who talk about God are crazy, that it is a disease of the brain. How clever we are, they say, how we enjoy ourselves with money, fame and sense enjoyments! A crow also thinks it's very clever but when it wakes up in the morning, it eats the excreta of others and then dies. See, how active a crow is. Very clever! (*All laugh.*)

"But those who meditate on God and pray day and night to be rid of attachment to worldly things and their love for 'lust and gold,' those who feel that sense pleasures are bitter, who like nothing but the nectar of the lotus feet of Hari, have the nature of swans. Put milk and water before a swan and it will drink the milk and leave the water. And have you seen the gait of a swan? It walks straight, in one direction. The movement of a pure-minded devotee is directed only towards God. He wants nothing else, he likes nothing else. (*To Bankim, sweetly*) "Please don't mind my words."

Bankim: "I'm not here only to hear pleasant words."

Chapter III

Sri Ramakrishna and service to others

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bankim*): "Maya is nothing but thinking that 'lust and gold' is the essence. It keeps you from thinking of or seeing God. After having one or two children, you should live with your wife like a brother and only talk to her about God. In this way the minds of both will go towards Him, and the wife will be a help in his spiritual life. You can't enjoy the bliss of God without first getting rid of animal tendencies. You should pray to God to rid you of these inclinations and you must pray with yearning. He is the controller of our hearts and will surely listen if the prayer is earnest.

"As for gold! Sitting on the bank of the Ganges at the foot of the Panchavati,[1] I threw money away into the water saying, Money is clay, clay is money."

Bankim: "Money is clay! Sir, if you have some money, you can give it to the poor! If money is clay, you can't practice compassion or charity."

Bankim, doing welfare of the world and 'giving up work'

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bankim*): "Compassion! Charity! What ability do you have to do good to others? A man tries to be so clever and runs here and there [doing so many things], but when he

1. A grove of 5 sacred trees that Sri Ramakrishna planted at Rasmani's Kali Temple garden. It was at the foot of one that he practiced many spiritual disciplines. The panchavati is a very secluded spot that brings divine inspiration to the mind effortlessly.

sleeps he doesn't even know if somebody is urinating in his mouth! Where is his pride, ego and arrogance then?

"A sannyasin must renounce 'lust and gold'. He cannot accept them. A person doesn't swallow his own spittle. If a sannyasin gives anybody anything, he doesn't keep it in his mind that he did it. Compassion comes from God. What compassion can a man practice? All charity is by the will of Rama. A genuine sannyasin renounces both internally and externally. Not only does he refuse to eat *gur* [raw sugar], he won't even keep it near him. If he himself should have it and ask others not to take it, nobody would listen to him.

"A householder needs money for his wife and children. He should save it to feed them. Only birds and sannyasins don't hoard. But when a bird has fledglings, it brings food for them in its beak – it also has to save. That's why householders need money – they have to support their families.

"If a householder is pure, he works without attachment. He offers the fruit of his actions – profit, loss, happiness and pain – to God. And he prays day and night for love of God. He has no other desire. This is called work without desire for results,[1] work without attachment. A sannyasin also has to work without expectation of any result. But a sannyasin doesn't engage in worldly activities like a householder.

"If a man of the world gives in charity without expectation of any reward, he does it for his own

1. Nishkama karma.

good, not for the good of others. Lord Hari dwells in all, so it is a way of serving Him. By serving Hari, one serves oneself – it is not by doing good for others. It is service to Lord Hari in all creatures – not merely in human beings, but also service to Him in birds and beasts. If a person doesn't expect name and fame or heaven after death or any return from those he serves, it is genuine work without desire or attachment. Working like this, without expectation of any reward, brings good to himself. This is known as karma yoga, renunciation of work. It is also a path for God-realization. But it is very difficult – it is not for the age of Kali.

"So I say that the man who works unattached in this way shows compassion, gives away in charity, and does good only to himself. It is God who does good to others, brings benefit to others – God who has created the moon and the sun, the father and the mother, fruits and flowers, paddy and creatures. The love that you see in parents is His love – He has endowed them with it for the preservation of living beings. The kindness that you see in a kind heart is His, which He has given to protect the helpless. Whether you show kindness or not, He will get His work done through some medium. His work is never stopped.

"What, then, is man's duty? What else but to take refuge in Him and to pray earnestly to Him that He be attained, be realized."

Only God is real and all else is illusion

"Sambhu said, 'I want to build many dispensaries and hospitals. They will be a great

help to the poor.' I said, 'Yes, it wouldn't be bad if you could do it without attachment. But it's very difficult to remain unattached without sincere love and devotion for God. Besides, if you involve yourself in a lot of different jobs, attachment creeps in from somewhere, you don't know from where. You think you're working unmindful of reward, but you may have a desire for recognition hidden from you – the desire for fame. Also, a person forgets God in the middle of too many engagements.' I also said, 'Sambhu, I ask you this: If God were to manifest Himself to you, would you want Him to give you dispensaries and hospitals?' A person doesn't desire anything else after attaining Him – after tasting candy syrup, who likes molasses?

"Those who enjoy building hospitals and dispensaries are good people, but they belong to a different class. A person who is a true devotee wants nothing but God. If he happens to fall into too much work, he prays earnestly, 'O God, be gracious enough to reduce my work. If there weren't so much work, my mind would be thinking of you every day. It is being wasted now – now it's only involved in thinking of worldly things.' A person who has pure love belongs to a different class. Only God is real, everything else is an illusion. Without realizing this, pure love can't be attained. The world is transitory – a matter of two days. Only He who runs it is real, eternal. Pure love and devotion cannot be attained until this is realized.

"Janaka and others performed work by the command of God.[1]"

1. Pratyadishtha.

Chapter IV

First science or God?

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Bankim*): "Some people think it isn't possible to realize God without reading books or studying scriptures. They think you should first know the world and the living beings and study science. (*All laugh.*) They say that without understanding God's creation, God can't be known. What do you say? God first, or science?"

Bankim: "Yes, a person has to have an adequate knowledge of the world first. How can God be known without some knowledge of the world? You should educate yourself first and then acquire knowledge of Him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You people say this. But one must know God first, and then His creation. After attaining God, you will know everything you need to know.

"If you can somehow manage a meeting with Jadu Mallick, then, if you want, you can know how many houses, how many shares, how many gardens he has. Jadu Mallick himself will tell you. But if you haven't been introduced to him and talked to him, and his doorkeeper doesn't let you in, how can you know about his houses, his company shares and gardens? Knowing him, you know everything.[1] But then you don't care to know ordinary things. The Vedas say this. Until you see a person you can talk about his virtues, but when he's face to face with

1. tasmin vijñāte sarvamidaṁ vijñātaṁ bhavati।

you, this talk stops. You become engrossed talking to him and don't need to talk about anything else.

"First God-realization, then His creation and anything else. Valmiki was given Rama's mantra to repeat, but he was asked to repeat 'mara', 'mara.' 'Ma' means God and 'ra' the world. First God then the world – by knowing the one, you know all. If you put fifty zeros after the figure "1", it becomes a very big number. But if you put the figure "1" after the zeros, it has no value. It is by having the digit "1" that you have many – first one, then many; first God,[1] then the world and His creation.

"First you need to know God. Why do you talk so much about the world, creation, science and so on? You need to eat mangoes. What need is there for you to know how many hundreds of mango trees there are in the garden, how many thousands of branches, how many millions of leaves? You have come to eat mangoes – eat them and leave. A man has come to this world to attain God. It's not good to forget this and give the mind to so many other things. You have come to eat mangoes. Eat and forget everything else."

Bankim: "But where can I get mangoes?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Pray to Him with yearning. If you are sincere, He will surely listen. He may give you holy company – someone may tell you what to do to enable you to find God."

1. Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven and all other things shall be added unto you – Jesus.

Bankim: "Who? Guru? He takes the better mangoes himself and gives us the inferior ones." (*Laughter.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why, my dear? It's what a person can digest – not everybody can digest fried rice and *kalia* [a meat preparation]. Fish is brought in the house. The mother doesn't serve fried rice and *kalia* to all her sons. She gives fish soup to one with a weak digestion. Does this mean the mother has less love for him?"

Way to attain God – yearning and faith like a child's

"You have to have faith in the words of the guru. The guru himself is Sat-chit-ananda, Sat-chit-ananda alone is the guru. By having faith in his words, by believing like a child, a person attains God. What faith a child has! His mother says, 'This is your elder brother,' immediately the child believes him to be his elder brother – full faith, absolutely one hundred twenty-five percent faith. The boy may be the son of a brahmin and the 'elder brother' a carpenter's or a potter's son. If the mother says, 'There is a hobgoblin in that room,' the boy absolutely believes that there is a hobgoblin in the room. The faith of a child. You have to have this kind of faith in the words of the guru. God can't be realized by cleverness or by a calculating or reasoning mind. You have to have faith and a simple mind – hypocrisy cannot help you. He is very near a guileless person and very far from an insincere one.

"You have to have such yearning for God as a child has when it doesn't find his mother. He

doesn't forget her even if you offer him sandesh or other sweets. There is no way to pacify him and he insists, 'No, I want to go to my mother!' Ah! What a state, a child mad for its mother and crying, 'Mother, Mother!' There's no way to make it forget its mother. The person who finds all joys of the world tasteless, who doesn't care for money, name, fame, physical comforts and sense enjoyments – it is only to the person who wants none of these, who sincerely calls for his mother with pangs of separation, that the mother leaves behind all her work and comes running.

"Such longing! Whatever path – whether Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Shakta, Brahmo – whichever path you take, the basic condition is yearning of this kind. He is the inner controller of the heart. There is no harm falling into a wrong path if you have yearning. He Himself will put you back on the right path.

"Besides, there are short-comings in all paths. Everybody thinks his own watch gives the right time, but nobody's watch is perfect. But that does not stop anyone's work. If there is yearning, holy company comes to help you correct your watch."

Appendix III

(B) With Keshab at the Dakshineswar Temple

Chapter One

Saturday, 1st January 1881, 18th day of Pausha, 1287 (B.Y.). The winter festival[1] of the Brahmo Samaj will soon be celebrated. Keshab Sen has come to the Dakshineswar Temple with Pratap, Trailokya, Jaygopal Sen and other Brahmo devotees to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Ram, Manomohan and some others are present.

Many of the Brahmo devotees have reached the Kali Temple before Keshab. They are sitting near Sri Ramakrishna and await Keshab's arrival eagerly, looking to the south for his arrival by steamer. They are restless and talking noisily.

Finally Keshab arrives. He has a bouquet of flowers and two bel fruits in his hand. He touches Sri Ramakrishna's feet and places the articles near, prostrating in salutation. Thakur returns the salutation by his own prostration.

Sri Ramakrishna laughs joyfully. He talks to Keshab.

Sri Ramakrishna (*with a smile, to Keshab*): "Keshab, you like me, but your disciples don't. I said to them, 'Let's make some noise, be restless so Govinda will come.'"

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1. Maghotsva.

(*To Keshab's disciples*) "Hey brothers, your Govinda has arrived! We've been making noise for a long time, but why would that make you joyful?

"It isn't easy to experience Govinda. Didn't you see in the play about Krishna that he and the cowherd boys and gopis only came after Narada prayed in Vrindavan with a yearning heart: 'O Govinda, my life-breath, my life!' Without yearning, you cannot see the Lord.

(*To Keshab*) "Keshab, do say something. All these people are eager to listen to you."

Keshab (*smiling, humbly*): "Talking here is like selling a needle to a blacksmith."

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "But the fact of the matter is that the nature of a devotee is like the nature of a hemp-smoker: 'You take a puff on the pipe so I can also have one.'" (*All laugh.*)

It is four o'clock. Music can be heard coming from the nahabat of the temple garden.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab and the others*): "Listen to how nice the music is. One person is playing a monotone and another is raising many waves of other modes. I'm like that. Why should I blow only one note when there are seven available to me? Why should I only say, 'So 'ham, So 'ham?' I like to call on Him in all attitudes – of *shanta* (serenity), of *dasya* (servant toward his master), of *vatsalya* (mother toward her child), of *sakhya* (friend) and of *madhura* (beloved). I'll call on Him in all these attitudes, I'll be happy and enjoy myself in all these moods."

Keshab listens to these words, speechless. He says, "I have never heard such an explanation of knowledge and devotion – amazing, so beautiful!"

Keshab (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "How long will you hide away in solitude like this? Crowds of people are going to fill this place."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do you mean? I just eat and drink, enjoy myself and repeat His name. I don't know about gathering people. 'I don't know the names of various villages – what I know is that I am a brahmin from Virbhum.' Hanuman said, 'I don't know the day of the week, the date, or the conjunction of stars. I only contemplate Rama.'"

Keshab: "Well, I'll gather the people. But they will all have to come here."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I am the dust of the dust of the feet of everyone. If they are kind enough to come here, let them come."

Keshab: "Whatever you say, your coming will not be in vain."

Chapter Two

Sri Ramakrishna with devotees at the Dakshineswar Temple

Arrangements for a kirtan are being made. Many devotees are participating. The kirtan party is coming south from the Panchavati. Hriday is playing a horn[1] and Gopidas is playing a drum.[2] Two devotees are playing cymbals.

1. Shinga.
2. Mridanga.

Sri Ramakrishna sings:

O man, if you want happiness in life, repeat the name of Hari.

You will have a life of joy, go to Vaikuntha and taste the fruit of liberation. That is the merit of repeating Hari's name.

Today I give you the name that Shiva sings with his five mouths.

Sri Ramakrishna dances with the strength of a lion.[1] Soon he goes into samadhi. When he comes out of samadhi, he sits in his room and talks with Keshab and some others.

About the harmony of religions

"God can be realized by all paths. Just like some of you have come here by carriage, some by boat, some by steamer, and some on foot – whatever way is convenient for you or according to your inclination. But the aim is only one, though some reach it earlier than others."

Way to realize God: give up ego

(*To Keshab and others*) "The more you rid yourself of your adjunct, or title, the closer to God you will be. Water doesn't stay on a high mound. It gathers in a hollow below it. It's the same with the shower of God's grace. It doesn't stay where there's ego. Humility is the only right attitude.

"You have to be very cautious in life. Even the clothes a person wears generates ego. I've seen a person with an inflated belly caused by an enlarged

1. Vikrama.

spleen. He was wearing a black-bordered dhoti and singing snatches of Vidhu Babu's love songs.

"People spout English when they wear western style boots.

"Ordinary people putting on the ochre cloth become proud. Only a small mistake on the part of somebody else irritates them."

End of sense enjoyment, yearning, and God-realization

"You can't see God without yearning. And such longing doesn't come until the desire for sense enjoyments has ended. Those who are surrounded by 'lust and greed,' who are not finished with their desires for enjoyment, do not feel yearning for God.

"There, in the countryside [Kamarpukur], Hriday's son used to stay with me the whole day. He was four or five years old. He'd keep himself busy doing this or that and forget everybody else. But as soon as it was evening, he'd say, 'I want to go to my mother.' Howsoever much I tried to get his attention, saying such things as 'I will give you a pigeon,' he couldn't forget his mother. He'd cry to go to her. Play – anything else – couldn't soothe him. Seeing him in that state, I'd cry too.

"This is a childlike cry for God. This is yearning. In this state, not play, not food, nothing else interested him. It is only when the desire for enjoyment ends that such yearning, such crying, comes."

Everyone sits silently, amazed to hear these words.

It is evening. A lamp man has lit the lamp in the room. Keshab and Brahmo devotees will leave after eating. Food is being prepared.

Keshab (*smiling*): "Puffed rice today too?"

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling*): "Hridu knows."

Leaf plates have been laid for the guests. They are first served puffed rice, then luchis, and then ragout. They are all full of joy, with smiles on their faces. It is nearly ten o'clock before it is over.

Thakur talks with Brahmo devotees at the foot of the Panchavati.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to Keshab and others*): "After realizing God you can live well in the world. First touch the Granddame, and then play the game.

"A devotee becomes unattached after he has realized God, like a mudfish. Even while living in muddy water, the body of a mudfish is not stained with mud."

It is about 11 o'clock. Everyone is impatient to leave. Pratap says, "Why not spend the night here?"

Sri Ramakrishna asks Keshab to stay.

Keshab (*smiling*): "I have work to do. I have to leave."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well my dear, can't you sleep without the smell of the fish basket? A fishwife was the guest of a gardener one night. She was given a room full of flowers to sleep in, but she couldn't sleep. (*All laugh.*) She lay there restlessly. The gardener's wife noticed her state and asked her, 'Why can't you sleep?' The fishwife replied, 'I don't

know, sister, but the fragrance of the flowers won't let me sleep. Can you bring my fish basket?' The fishwife sprinkled some water on the basket and fell fast asleep smelling it." (*All laugh.*)

Leaving, Keshab took a few flowers that he had offered at Thakur's feet and salutes him by prostrating. He and the devotees then cry, "Victory to the scriptural prescription!"[1]

Keshab gets into the carriage of the Brahmo devotee, Jaygopal Sen, and they leave for Calcutta.

1. Vidhan.

Appendix IV

Sri Ramakrishna's Visit to Surendra's Home

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna with Ram, Manomohan, Trailokya, Mahendra Goswami and others

Today Sri Ramakrishna and some devotees have come to Surendra's home. It is a day in the month of Ashada, 1881 A.D. It will be dusk soon.

Earlier this afternoon Sri Ramakrishna rested at Manomohan's residence.

Devotees have gathered in Surendra's second floor parlour. Mahendra Goswami, Bholanath Pal and other neighbours are also present. Keshab Sen was expected, but was unable to come. Trailokya Sannyal and some other devotees of the Brahmo Samaj have come.

A cotton carpet with a sheet on it has been spread on the floor of the parlour. A beautiful carpet and bolster have been laid over them. Surendra leads Thakur to the carpet and asks him to sit there.

Sri Ramakrishna says, "But why?" Instead, he sits with Mahendra Goswami. For several months, whenever there has been a festival at Jadu Mallick's garden, Sri Ramakrishna has attended it.

Mahendra Goswami (*to the devotees*): "For months I used to be with him [Sri Ramakrishna]

almost all the time. I've never seen such a great man. His spiritual moods are not ordinary."

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the goswami*): "What are you saying? I'm the lowest of the low, poorest of the poor. I am servant to his servants. Only Krishna is great.

"He who is the Indivisible Sat-chit-ananda is alone Sri Krishna. From a distance the water of the ocean looks blue, but when you are close to it you see that it has no colour. He is with attributes and He is also without attributes. The being who is the Eternal is the phenomenal as well.

"Why is Sri Krishna bent in three places [*tribhanga*]? Because of his intense love for Radha. That which is the Absolute is also Kali, the Primal Power which creates, preserves and dissolves. He who is Krishna is also Kali. The source is one. All the rest is a game, divine play."

Way to realize God

"You can see God. You can see Him through a pure mind, a pure intellect. Attraction for 'lust and greed' defiles the mind.

"It is the mind that is all important. It's like a newly-laundered cloth that takes the colour it's dipped in. It's the mind alone that makes a person either a man of knowledge or ignorant. 'So and so has gone bad' means that a bad dye has coloured the person's mind."

Trailokya Sannyal and other Brahmo devotees arrive. They sit down.

Surendra comes in with a garland to put around Thakur's neck. Thakur takes the garland in his hand, but throws it away.

Eyes brimming with tears, Surendra goes to the western verandah and sits down. Ram, Manomohan and a few others are with him. Surendra says, "I am very hurt. What does a brahmin from the Rad region[1] know about the value of these things? It costs a lot. I spoke in anger, 'Put the other garlands on the necks of the other devotees!' I understand now that it was my fault. The lord is not bought with money. Nor can he be won by pride. I am proud. Why should He accept my worship? I have no desire to live anymore."

As he says this, streams of tears flow down his face and onto his chest.

Meanwhile, Trailokya is singing in the room. Sri Ramakrishna is dancing, intoxicated. He picks up the garland which he had thrown aside and puts it around his neck. Holding it in one hand, he sings and dances, swinging it with the other hand:

You are the philosopher stone of my heart.

And he adds:

Do I want any other jewel?

I have put on the garland of the moon.

Surendra is overwhelmed with joy that Thakur is dancing with the garland around his neck. He says to himself, "The Lord takes the pride of the

1. A few districts in West Bengal where Sri Ramakrishna was born.

proud. But He is the treasure of the poor, of the humble."

Sri Ramakrishna sings:

Behold the two brothers[1] have come, they who shed tears when chanting Hari's name;

They who offer love even after receiving blows, these two brothers have come.

They who are Kanai and Balai of Vraja, these two brothers have come.

They who embrace even the pariah, these two brothers have come.

Several devotees dance with Sri Ramakrishna. Finally they all sit down and talk with one another.

Sri Ramakrishna says to Surendra, "Won't you give me something to eat?"

Saying this, he gets up and goes to the inner apartments. The women come and salute him by prostrating on the ground with great devotion. After his meal, Thakur rests awhile and then leaves for Dakshineswar.

1. Gauranga and Nityananda.

Appendix V

Sri Ramakrishna at Manomohan's Home

Chapter One

With Keshab Sen, Surendra, Rajendra Mitra, Trailokya and others

At Manomohan's house, 23 Shimulia Street, near Surendra's residence, Saturday, 3 December 1881 today; 19th day of Agrahayana, 1288 (Bengali Year).

Sri Ramakrishna arrived at about four o'clock in the afternoon. Manomohan's is a small one-storeyed house [one upper floor], with a small courtyard. Thakur sits in the parlour overlooking the street, on the ground floor.

Sri Ramakrishna talks with Ishan Mukherji from Bhawanipur.

Ishan: "Why did you renounce family life? The scriptures speak highly of the householder stage of life."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I don't know what is good or bad. I do what He makes me do. I say what He makes me say."

Ishan: "If everyone were to renounce the householder's life, it would be working against God."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why should everyone renounce? Is it His will that everybody should be like dogs and jackals with their mouths in 'lust and

greed'? Does He will nothing else? How do you know what He wills and what He doesn't?

"You're saying it is His will that a person leads a family life. Why don't you see it is also His will when a husband or wife and son die? When you starve, when there is poverty, why don't you see that as God's will too?

"Maya doesn't allow us to know what His will is. Because of His maya, the ephemeral appears to us as permanent and the permanent appears transitory. The world is transitory. It is here now and then gone. But His maya doesn't let us see that. It is His maya that makes me think I'm the doer and all these – wives, sons, brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, hearth and home – are all mine.

"Maya is both knowledge and ignorance. The world of ignorance makes you forget, and the knowledge aspect of maya, of spiritual knowledge, takes you towards God, towards love for God and holy company.

"But for the person who is beyond maya, by God's grace, they are both the same, knowledge and ignorance.

"There is a lot of enjoyment in the householder life. But what is the enjoyment of 'lust and greed'? Once you swallow sandesh, you don't remember if it was sweet or sour.

"Anyway, why should everybody renounce 'lust and greed'? It isn't even possible to renounce before the time is ripe. When the desire for enjoyment is over, the time for renunciation comes. Can you do it by force?

"There is a kind of renunciation called monkey renunciation. It is the renunciation of people of little understanding. A widowed mother supported herself and her son by spinning. The boy lost the small job that he had. As a consequence he felt he should renounce the world. He put on ochre and went to Kashi. But in a few days he wrote to say that he had found a job paying ten rupees a month. He tried to buy a gold ring, a dhoti and a shirt with it. How could he get rid of that desire for enjoyment?"

Chapter Two

Sri Ramakrishna at Manomohan's

Keshab has arrived with Brahmo devotees. Sri Ramakrishna is sitting in the courtyard. Keshab salutes him with great devotion. He takes his seat to the left of Thakur, and Ram sits on his right.

After a reading from the Bhagavata, Thakur speaks. Householder devotees are sitting all around the courtyard.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Worldly duty is very difficult to perform. After spinning around quickly, a person feels faint and falls. But if he holds to a pillar while he spins, there is no danger. Do your duty, but do not forget God.

"So you ask, what is the way out if it's so difficult? The way out is the yoga of practice. I've seen carpenters' wives in the village [Kamarpukur] pounding flattened rice with one hand, being careful that the pestle doesn't mangle their fingers. And at the same time they nurse their babies at the

breast and talk to customers, demanding payment before they leave.

"An unfaithful woman attends to all her household work, but her mind is constantly on her lover.

"But some spiritual practice is necessary for this. From time to time you need to go into solitude and call on Him. You should first develop love for God and then do your duty. If you cut a jackfruit with your bare hands, its milky juice will stick to them. But if you rub your hands with oil first, and then cut the jackfruit, its juice won't stick to them."

Now there is music in the courtyard. And then Trailokya sings: "Victory, victory to the All-Blissful Mother, the form of Brahman!"

Thakur dances in joy. Keshab and other devotees dance with him. It is cold, but Thakur's body is covered with perspiration.

Having enjoyed the kirtan, everybody sits down and Sri Ramakrishna asks for something to eat. A plate of sweets is brought to him from the inner apartments. Keshab holds it while Thakur eats from it. He holds a drinking glass as well in this manner. Then he wipes Thakur's mouth with a cloth and begins to fan him.

Sri Ramakrishna again takes up the question of whether or not it is possible to lead a spiritual life in the household.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab and others*): "Householders who are able to pray to Him are heroes. They have a very heavy load of twenty seers

on their heads and yet they try to realize God. Such devotees are heroic.

"Even if you say that it's very difficult, in spite of that, what is not possible with God's grace? Even the impossible becomes possible. If you bring a light into a room that's been dark for a thousand years, does it light up little by little? It lights up immediately."

Listening to these words of hope, Keshab and other householder devotees are filled with joy.

Keshab (*smiling, to Rajendra Mitra*): "It would be nice to have a celebration like this at your home."

Rajendra: "All right, that would be nice! Ram, you please take charge of it." (Rajendra is Ram and Manomohan's uncle.)[1]

Thakur is now taken to the inner apartments. He is to be served a meal there. Shyamasundari, Manomohan's mother, has prepared the meal. Sri Ramakrishna sits down and looks at the different sweets and other plates of food. He smiles and says when he eats, "You have done so much for me." He is also given a glass of ice water.

Keshab and the other devotees sit in the courtyard to eat. Coming down to them, Thakur starts feeding them. And he dances and sings of luchis and balls of sweets[2] to entertain them.

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1. The husband of Ram and Manomohan's mother's sister.
2. Luchi-munda.

It is time for Sri Ramakrishna to go back to Dakshineswar. Keshab and the other devotees take the dust of his feet and see him board the carriage.

Appendix VI

Sri Ramakrishna at Rajendra's House

Chapter One

Sri Ramakrishna with Ram, Manomohan, Keshab and other devotees. 1881 A.D.

Rajendra Mitra's home is on Bechu Chatterji Street in Thanthania. Keshab had suggested to Rajendra, when they were at the festival at Manomohan's house, that it would be nice if a similar festival were celebrated at his house one day. Rajendra happily arranged one.

Today is Saturday, 10 December 1881, 26th of Agrahayana, 1288 (B.Y.). The celebration is today. It is a very happy occasion. Many devotees are coming, including Keshab and other Brahmo devotees.

Just before the festival, Umanath had informed Rajendra about the death of Bhai Aghornath, a Brahmo devotee. Aghornath had passed away at 2 a.m. in Lucknow on 8 December, 24th Agrahayan. The news had been received by wire the same night and Umanath had brought the message the next day. Keshab and the other Brahmo devotees were in mourning. Rajendra worried whether or not they would be able to come on Saturday.

Ram had said to Rajendra, "Why do you worry whether or not Keshab Babu comes? Thakur is coming. He is always in samadhi, he sees God face to face – the joy of which makes the whole world taste joy."

When Ram, Rajendra and Manomohan visited Keshab, he said, "But I never said I wouldn't go. The paramahamsa is going. How can I stay away? I'll

certainly go. Because I'm in mourning, I can eat separately."

Keshab then talked with Rajendra and other devotees. There is a picture of Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi in the room.

Rajendra (*to Keshab*): "Many people say that the paramahamsa is an incarnation of Chaitanya."

Keshab (*pointing to the picture of samadhi*): "Such samadhi can be seen nowhere. Jesus Christ, Mohammed and Chaitanya used to experience it."

Sri Ramakrishna arrives at Manomohan's house at 3 o'clock. He rests for awhile and has some refreshments. Surendra says, "Come, sir, yesterday you said you wanted to see a camera." He takes Thakur by carriage to the Bengal Photographer Studio. The photographer shows how a photo is taken. A glass plate is covered with silver nitrate on one side to take the image.

Thakur is photographed. He immediately goes into samadhi.

Afterward, he goes to Rajendra Mitra's house. Rajendra is a retired deputy magistrate.

Mahendra Goswami is reading from the *Bhagavata* in the courtyard of the house. A number of devotees are present, but Keshab has not yet arrived. Sri Ramakrishna talks to the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to the devotees*): "Why should it not be possible in family life? But it is very difficult. Today I came by the Baghbazar bridge. It is held up with so many chains! If one of these chains breaks, the bridge won't be affected because

it's tied with so many other chains. Householders have as many bondages. Without God's grace there's no way to get rid of them.

"After realizing God, there's no danger. There are both knowledge and ignorance in His maya. You become unattached when you realize God. Then you have correct understanding, the state of a paramahamsa. There is water in milk. A swan takes the milk from the mixture and discards the water. A swan can do this, but not a sparrow.[1]"

A Devotee: "Then what is the way for a family man?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Faith in the words of the guru. Follow his instructions. Hold onto them like you're whirling around a pillar then do your duties – that is, do the work of the world.

"Don't think of the guru as a human being. Sat-chit-nanda Himself comes as the guru. By the grace of the guru a person sees the form of his spiritual ideal. And then the guru merges into the ideal.

"What is not possible through simple and unquestioning faith? During the rice-eating ceremony[2] of a guru's son, his disciples contributed to the best of their abilities. There was a poor widow who was also a disciple. She had a cow. She brought a small jug of milk. The guru had expected her to take the responsibility for all the milk and curds of the ceremony. He became angry and threw away the milk she had brought, saying, 'Just go

1. A shalik: A black sparrow with a small yellow beak.
2. Annaprasana.

drown yourself!' Taking it as a command, the woman went to the river to drown herself. Narayana appeared to her and said, 'There's curd in this container. The more you pour, the more there will be. And your guru will be pleased.' When the guru was given the container, he was amazed. When he heard the whole story, he went to the shore of the river and said to the widow, 'If you do not show me Narayana, I will commit suicide in this very river.' Narayana appeared, but the guru could not see Him. The woman then prayed, 'Lord, if you do not reveal yourself to my guru, he will quit his body and I will also die.' Then Narayana showed himself once to the guru.

"You see, because of her devotion to her guru, not only did she attain the vision of God, but her guru also had His vision.

"So I say:

Even if my guru visits a tavern he remains my ever-joyful guru.

"Everybody wants to become a guru, but only a rare few want to be disciples. So notice that rainwater doesn't collect on a hill. It collects in hollows on lower ground.

"You should practice spiritual disciplines with full faith in the name the guru gives at initiation.

"It is said that a pearl oyster opens itself for a drop of rain water that comes from the Svati constellation of stars. As soon as the drop falls into the oyster, it dives deep into the water and stays there till a pearl is formed."

Chapter II

Sri Ramakrishna at Rajendra's house

Seeing so many Brahmo devotees, Sri Ramakrishna says, "Is this a Brahmo Samaj gathering or mere show? There is regular worship in the Brahmo Samaj, which is very good, but you have to dive deep. Mere worship and lectures are not enough. You have to pray to God to take away desire for enjoyments and attachment, and to grant you pure love and devotion at His lotus feet.

"An elephant has both inner and outer tusks. The outer tusks are for show, but the inner ones are teeth for eating. Secret desire for the enjoyment of 'lust and greed' harms a person's devotion.

"What is the use of giving lectures? A vulture flies high, but its sight remains fixed on charnel-pits. A rocket first shoots high into the sky, but the next moment it falls to the ground.

"A person only remembers God at the time of death when the desire for enjoyment has been done away with. Otherwise, only things of the world come to the mind – wife, son, home, wealth, prestige, rank and so on. A parrot can learn to say 'Radha Krishna,' but when it's seized by a cat, it only squawks 'caw-caw'.

"That's why practice is essential – to repeat His name and qualities, to sing His glory, to meditate on Him, to contemplate Him, to pray – in order to get rid of the desire for enjoyment and attachment and fix the mind on His lotus feet.

"Be like a maid-servant who attends to all her work but at the same time keeps her mind in her own village. In other words, attend to all your duties while keeping your mind fixed on God. A worldly life sticks to you. A genuine devotee lives like a mudfish – in the mud, but the mud does not stick to his body.

"Brahman and His Primal Power are the same. By calling on Him as Mother, you soon gain love and devotion for God."

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna begins to sing:

The kite of my mind was soaring high up in the sky of the feet of Mother Shyama.

The rough wind of misdeeds made it fall circling to the ground.[1]

And then he sings:

O Mother Shyama! Yashoda would make You dance when she called You her precious blue jewel!

Where have You hidden that form, O terrible Shyama?

Now Thakur stands up and dances as he sings. The devotees also stand up.

Sri Ramakrishna goes into samadhi now and then. Everyone watches him intently, standing still like images in a picture. Doctor Dukari puts his fingers in Thakur's eyes to test the samadhi. The devotees are irritated to see it.

After this amazing dancing and singing, they all seat themselves again. Just then Keshab and many Brahmo devotees arrive. They salute Thakur and sit as well.

---

1. For complete song, refer Volume III, Section IX.

Rajendra (*to Keshab*): "We had wonderful music and dancing." He then asks Trailokya to sing again.

Keshab (*to Rajendra*): "Since the paramahamsa has already taken his seat, the kirtan will never pick up tempo."

Trailokya and other Brahmo devotees begin to sing:

> But for once, repeat the name of Hari, say the name of Hari, repeat the name of Hari.
>
> Cross the ocean of the world, by repeating, 'Hari, Hari, Hari.'
>
> Hari is present in the water, Hari is on earth, Hari is present in the moon, Hari is present in the sun.
>
> Hari is present in the air and in fire. This vast expanse of earth is filled with Hari.

Arrangements are being made on the first floor for a feast for Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees. He is still sitting in the courtyard talking with Keshab. He tells Keshab that he had been to a photographer in Radha Bazaar.

Sri Ramakrishna (*smiling, to Keshab*): "Today I saw a beautiful machine for taking photographs. For one thing I saw that a bare glass does not receive the image, but that first they rub something black on the back side of the glass. Then the photograph appears. Just like this, a person may hear spiritual talks that leave no impression on the mind, it is forgotten the next moment. But if the person has the black ink of love for God within him already, and attraction for Him is rubbed on the mind, then he internalizes the words. Otherwise they are heard and forgotten."

Thakur goes to the first floor. He is given a seat on a beautiful small carpet.

Shyamasundari, Manomohan's mother, serves the food. Manomohan says, "My affectionate mother has saluted Thakur by lying prostrate on the floor. She has also served him food." Rama and others were there then.

Keshab and other devotees sit for their meal on the verandah opposite the room in which Thakur is being fed.

Shailajacharan Mukherji, the present attendant of the Shyamasundar image in the shrine on Bechu Chatterji Street, is present today.

Appendix VII

Sri Ramakrishna at the Grand Festival of the Brahmo Samaj at Shimulia

Chapter One

In the company of Ram, Keshab, Narendra and other devotees

Today Thakur is attending, with devotees, the annual festival of the Brahmo Samaj at Shimulia. It is being held at the house of Jnana Chaudhary. It is Sunday, 1st January 1882, 18th Day of Pausha, 1288 (B.Y.), time about five o'clock.

Keshab Sen, Ram, Manomohan, Balaram, the Brahmo devotee Raj Mohan, Jnana Chaudhary, Kedar, the Brahmo devotee Kantibabu, Kalidas Sarkar, Kalidas Mukherji, Narendra, Rakhal and many devotees are present.

Only a few days ago, Narendra visited Thakur at Dakshineswar with Ram and some others. He is also at the festival today. He visits the Shimulia Brahmo Samaj from time to time and worships and sings there.

The worship will be performed according to the rules of the Brahmo Samaj.

First are readings from scriptures. Narendra, who can sing, sings at their request.

It is evening. Gauri Pandit of Indesh arrives in the dress of a brahmachari.

Gauri: "Where is the gentleman, the paramahamsa?"

In a little while, Keshab arrives with devotees. He salutes Sri Ramakrishna by lying prostrate on the ground. They are all seated in the courtyard enjoying themselves.

Seeing the householder devotees all around, Thakur says with a laugh: "Why shouldn't it be possible in family life? But, you know, there's a problem. The mind is not with you. You can only give it to God if it's with you. And you've enslaved it, enslaved it with 'lust and greed'. So there's a constant need of holy company.

"It is only when the mind is in your possession that it's possible to practice spiritual disciplines. Constant company of the guru, service to him, and the company of holy people is essential. Either you think about Him day and night in seclusion, or have the company of the holy. When the mind is left alone it gradually dries up. It's like if you keep water separately in a jug – it will become dry. But if you keep the jug in the water of the Ganges, it won't dry out.

"The iron in a blacksmith's shop reddens in fire. But if you take it out of the fire, it becomes black as before. That's why it should be put in the furnace from time to time.

"To say that I am the doer, that because of this, the world is running, the house is mine and this is my family, is ignorance. But to feel that I am His servant, His devotee, or His child is very good.

"This I-ness doesn't disappear for good. You can rid yourself of it by reasoning for awhile, but it soon returns, as if from nowhere, like the bleating and jerking of a slaughtered goat.

"The 'I' which God retains in you after His vision is called the 'ripe I' – like a sword turning gold after touching the philosopher's stone. It can't be used for killing anymore."

Sri Ramakrishna, sitting in the worship hall, says this to Keshab and the other devotees. They all listen with rapt attention. It is 8 p.m. The bell rings three times for worship to begin.

Sri Ramakrishna (*to Keshab and the others*): "What? You haven't started worship yet?"

Keshab: "What else would our worship be? What has been happening is our worship."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, brother. You must perform according to your rules."

Keshab: "Why? Worship is going on very nicely!"

At Sri Ramakrishna's repeated insistence, Keshab rises and begins the worship. During it, Thakur suddenly stands up and goes into samadhi. The Brahmo devotees sing:

O mind, chant the name of Hari once.

By repeating His name, one crosses the sea of the world.

Hari is in water, Hari is on land, Hari is in fire, Hari is in the wind,

Hari in the moon, Hari in the sun, the whole universe is filled with Hari.

Sri Ramakrishna is still standing and in ecstasy. Keshab, holding him by the hand very carefully, brings him down from the hall to the courtyard.

The song continues. Thakur begins to dance to the beat of the song. Devotees all around him also dance.

On the first floor of Jnana Babu's house, arrangements are afoot for a feast for Sri Ramakrishna, Keshab and the others.

After it they all return to the ground floor and take their seats. While talking, Thakur again begins to sing. Keshab joins him:

> The black bee of my mind is drawn in sheer delight to the blue lotus flower of Mother Shyama's feet.[1]
>
> The honey of all worldly things – the flowers of lust and cravings – have lost all charm.

Then they sing:

> The kite of my mind was soaring high up in the sky of the feet of Mother Shyama.
>
> The rough wind of misdeeds made it fall circling to the ground.[2]

Both Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab appear intoxicated. They dance and sing with the others till midnight.

Having rested for awhile, Thakur says to Keshab, "Why did you send me gifts on the occasion of your son's marriage. Please take them back. What do I need them for?"

---

1. For the complete song refer to Volume II, Section II, Chapter VII.
2. For the complete song refer to Volume III, Section IX.

Keshab smiles a little. Then Thakur says, "Why do you publish my name in newspapers? Nobody can be made great by being written about in books and newspapers. If God makes someone great, even a person who lives in a dense forest becomes known. A flower opens out in a dense forest and a honeybee finds it, not flies. What can a man do? Don't look up to a man. Men are just worms. The mouth that speaks well of a man one moment will soon run him down the next. I don't want to be respected. I'd rather be the lowest of the low, the most insignificant of the insignificant."

One day in the month of Ashada in 1881 A.D., Thakur Sri Ramakrishna visited Surendra's mansion. Keshab was also expected, but he couldn't make it. He was busy arranging the marriages of his eldest son and his second daughter.

On Friday, 15 July 1881, the 1st day of Shravana,[1] Keshab, with a number of Brahmo devotees from Calcutta, had enjoyed a cruise to Somra in the steam yacht belonging to his son-in-law, the king of Cooch Bihar. During the cruise he broke his journey at Dakshineswar and took the paramahamsa and Hriday on board. In the yacht were Keshab, Trailokya and other Brahmo devotees and Kumar Gajendra, Narayan, Nagendra and so on.

While talking about God without form, Sri Ramakrishna entered samadhi. Trailokya Sannyal was singing to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. Coming out of samadhi, Thakur sang:

What a machine Mother Shyama has built!

---

1. Nagendra had narrated this to M. two or three months later. Many months later M. met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time, on 26 February 1882 A.D.

What a machine Mother Kali has made!

In this machine, three and a half cubits high, what pranks She plays![1]

On the return journey Thakur disembarked at Dakshineswar. Keshab had been invited to Kalicharan Bannerji's house and got off at the Ahiritola Ghat to go by foot to his house on Masjidvari Street.

1. For the complete song, refer Volume IV, Section XVI.

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